

Gentlepeople,

I have copied and pasted my testimony here and I have attached a copy for your convenience. I have also attached a Benefit Cost document FYI. It indicates the cost to the community of the loss of forests and wetlands. Here are some photos of the area in and around the AKT (Arthur Kill Terminal)

Thank you for your consideration.

Rev. Gabriella Velardi-Ward

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40 Wolkoff Lane

Staten Island, NY 10303

May 12, 2024

Attn: Stephanie Shellooe,

AICP, Director, Environmental Assessment and Review Division

DCP Environmental Impact Chief Stephanie Shellooe

Re: Arthur Kill LLC, CEQR Project 23DCP056R

Dear Ms. Shellooe,

First, I would like to tell you about my background, education, and experience for clarification and context. I worked for the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, Capital Projects, for 23 years as an architect, both in Design and in Construction. (1993-2016) While in Design, I represented the Parks Department at the Mayor's Office of Construction for Sustainable Construction. We were formulating policy for all public buildings in NYC to include sustainability both in design, construction, and maintenance.

My knowledge of sustainability, as well as the effects of climate change and sea level rise come from my education as well as my work experience. This includes knowledge of water dynamics, ecology, design and site design, landscape design, sustainability, urban planning and building structures. I studied Urban Planning with Ron Shiffman, a City Planner, and co-founder of the Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development. He was on the NYC Planning Commission from 1990 - 1996. His additional credits are too many to elucidate here.

I also taught various aspects of architecture at what was then called New York City Technical College. And I am the co-founder and Director of the Coalition for Wetlands and Forests.

It is the opinion of the Coalition for Wetlands and Forests that mitigation should only take place on Staten Island and not in Jamaica Bay. Our Staten Island history of flooding demands that. Ideally, the Arthur Kill Terminal (AKT) proposal should be defeated in favor of the natural protection that wetlands and forests provide. If that cannot happen, mitigation should be as close to the area that is losing its protection, as possible.

The AKT project will destroy 25 – 35 acres, or more, of wetland and forest. The area of Charleston as well as the areas around it were badly damaged during Hurricane Sandy. With this project, the loss of forests, tidal wetlands, and various other forms of wetland will once again endanger this community due to the effects of climate change.

Some suggestions for mitigation at locations near the AKT project are the Outerbridge Ponds, the area of the Con Edison plants, and the areas near or around the Mill Creek tidal wetland.

Some suggestions for mitigation on the north shore are at some of the cross streets at Richmond Terrace such as Bank Street, near or under the Bayonne Bridge- the site of the uranium storage, Port Richmond Ave, Jewett Avenue, Bard Ave, near Faber Park, near Van Name St. Most of these locations have been flooded. Some are projected to experience severe flooding in the near future.

Benefits of Wetlands and Forests:

1. Trees provide oxygen that people need and people provide CO2 that trees need. We are partners in breathing with trees. No trees, no people.
2. Trees lower the temperatures in surrounding communities.
3. Trees and wetlands absorb flood waters. One tree can absorb 100 gal of water per day and evaporate it.
4. Trees and wetlands buffer storm surges and other types of flooding. Trees and wetlands protect the community.
5. Wetlands filter polluted water, cleansing it as it flows, protecting ecosystems.
6. Wetlands reduce erosion and stabilize shorelines.
7. Trees sequester CO2 in the soil and in the tree branches and leaves.
8. Forests and wetlands provide a source of food, shelter, and a breeding ground for a diverse range of wildlife that thrive in this type of environment. With the loss of habitat, animals live closer to communities and animal born viruses spread faster.
9. Forests provide a variety of Medicinals.

9. Forests and wetlands provide opportunities for educational and recreational activities.

10. Wetlands and forests create beauty and places to relieve humans from stress and recover from this stressful world humans have created.

11. When I first moved to Graniteville, we had a wide variety of birds singing every morning. Now that the freshwater wetland and forest are gone, there are very few birds left. The chain of life has been broken and now there are consequences. Now we have lots of bugs without predators. Let's learn from our mistakes.

The Dangers of Climate Change

In this part of the country, climate change includes sea level rise, torrential rain flooding and storm surge flooding. The seas are rising faster than scientists have previously acknowledged. The ice in Greenland is mostly gone. The Permafrost is now exploding methane, a greenhouse gas more powerful than CO₂. The ice shelves in the Antarctic are falling into the ocean in what is a feedback loop. The more the ice melts, the more the oceans rise. With less ice, oceans absorb higher temperatures. With higher temperatures, more ice melts.

In other parts of our country and world, things are worse. Tornado clusters, dead pelicans in southern California, beached whales, stronger storms, hotter temperatures, we cannot wait any longer to protect people. We must make natural protection a priority now.

How to Protect People from the Effects of Climate Change

1. **Stop destroying wetlands and forests**, no matter how much money is involved.
2. When projects are under review by NYC Department of City Planning or by NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, **consider the effects of climate change before the project is approved.**
3. **Before approval, check for underground streams, especially in Staten Island.** Old Place Creek goes underground at South Ave. It goes northeast to Maple Parkway about a mile away. During Hurricane Ida, 4 homes on Maple Parkway had to be evacuated. Old Place Creek went right under those homes and a crack was formed in a bearing wall. **This was confirmed by a hydrologist and by a NYSDEC map.**

4. Learn from other States and other countries who are addressing the effects of climate change. Venice solved the problem of flooding in St Mark's Square through various means including a series of retractable locks and by addressing the erosion of the barrier reef island. It was eroded by forbidding large boats from navigating too close to that island. And they now have a lookout post, in the water, far from Venice, to warn of an oncoming storm surge. There are many other examples such as this.

5. And of course, no more drilling for non-renewable energy sources. I remember talk of climate change in the 1970s. I studied it in the 1980s. It's more than 50 years since then and we are still debating its validity and still not doing much to protect people.

Unfortunately, it is now very late in the game. So, destroying a forested wetland or any other type of wetland to install renewable energy technology will not help vulnerable communities before there is another storm surge and the inevitable sea level rise. Long-term thinking with installation of renewable energy sources **must not be at the cost of the destruction of natural green infrastructure.** I believe that the approval of this AKT project will only further endanger the community.

What planning are we doing for this eventuality?

Graniteville Wetland -the trees and spongy wetland soil were **destroyed** in the summer of 2021. On September 1st of 2021, Graniteville was flooded for the first time ever with Hurricane Ida. This freshwater wetland saved the Environmental Justice community of black and brown people during Hurricane Sandy. We no longer have protection from flooding. **18 acres of freshwater wetland - gone!**

Bloomfield -the Matrix Global Logistics Park West project, if approved, will destroy 72 acres of wetland with the possibility of destroying an additional 200 acres of wetland. It will also endanger the lives of elderly, disabled and low-income residents of the mobile home community. **272 acres of wetland - endangered.**

Charleston -the Wind Energy project also known as the Arthur Kill Terminal project. This is one of the areas that was badly damaged during Hurricane Sandy, **35 or more acres of forested wetland - endangered.**

There are now approximately 325 acres of wetland and forest either destroyed already or in danger of being destroyed. All of them are on the west shore of Staten Island.

Most of the SI west coast is at or slightly above sea level. The destruction of wetlands on this side of the island will mean that eventually the west coast of SI will be swallowed up by sea level rise and/or storm surge.

What will happen to the people, the poor, the elderly, the disenfranchised, and the front-line communities when the west coast of Staten Island gets swallowed up by the effects of climate change?

In April 2012, I was the supervisor, the resident engineer for the Victory Diner project in Midland Beach. The forest was right on the beach. Years before, wetlands were destroyed, and the blueberry bogs were covered with concrete. The Victory Diner project included the cutting down of many acres of the forest. In October of 2012, Midland Beach, and areas south of there, were hit by a 15' storm surge called Hurricane Sandy. 24+ people died in horrendous ways. I was there before, during and after the storm. I saw people taken out of their homes in body bags. Half the people who died in NYC, died on Staten Island. This should have been a wake-up call, but it was not. NYC and NYS are still allowing the destruction of natural green infrastructure. When will we learn? When will we protect the people?

Climate change is real and is happening now. If ignored, it has real consequences.

Rev. Gabriella Velardi-Ward BFA, AAS. B. Arch, M. Theo course work.

Co-Founder and Director of the
Coalition for Wetlands and Forests

StPraxedisRCC@gmail.com

SICWF2017@gmail.com

SICWF.org