

Belmont Park Redevelopment Civic and Land Use Improvement Project

Public Hearing on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement
Hosted by Empire State Development

Elmont Memorial Library
January 9, 2019

Public Comments of
Michael L. Culotta, Esq.

Good evening Empire State Development (ESD). Thank you for holding the public hearings on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Belmont Park Redevelopment Civic and Land Use Improvement Project. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to speak tonight.

My name is Michael Culotta, and I am a resident of Floral Park. I have lived in the village for three years with my wife. We have a two-year old daughter, and we recently learned that we have another baby girl on the way.

My wife and I love our village. It is a jewel. It is quiet, clean, and safe. We live on Plainfield Avenue, just a couple of blocks away from Floral Park Memorial High School, within the area of significant impacts for the Belmont Project. I would like to take this opportunity to express some concerns that we have with this project.

Put simply, the Belmont Project is too big. It is like trying to stuff ten pounds of development into a five-pound bag. Initially, the project began as an 18,000 seat arena for the New York Islanders. There was significant scope creep over time, and the project now includes over 435,000 square feet of retail and a large hotel. By some estimates, there may be up to 40,000 people traveling through our local community each day—that is like a Belmont Stakes Day every day. Our local infrastructure cannot support that type of development.

The traffic impacts would be significant and unbearable, particularly on streets like Plainfield Avenue, where my family lives. The project would turn our community into a parking lot, around the clock. Uber and Lyft would flood our streets. The project would cause air pollution and an increase in noise levels in our quiet community. I am concerned that the Cross Island Parkway already is heavily congested, and ESD has not undertaken a traffic study which examines impacts on the entire length of the parkway.

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ESD admits in the DEIS that it cannot mitigate these significant adverse impacts. But ESD can eliminate the cause of them by scaling back the size of this project. I am here tonight to strongly urge ESD to scale back the size of this project.

To that end, I strongly urge ESD to eliminate the 435,000 total square feet of retail in its proposal, and to consider an alternative that includes an arena only. After all, brick and mortar retail is giving way to e-commerce, and this type of investment in our community simply does not make sense.

Instead of the retail, I urge ESD to consider an alternative that utilizes Site B for parking only. Do not use the East and North Lots in Belmont Park for parking. Those lots are too close to our homes and our schools—Floral Park-Bellerose School and Floral Park Memorial High School. Close the Hempstead Turnpike entrance to Plainfield Avenue during events at the arena, and direct traffic to the Cross Island Parkway—keep it off of our quiet residential streets.

I am also concerned with safety. This project would place a huge strain on the small Police and Fire Departments in Floral Park and the surrounding communities. Emergency response times would be impacted, and these departments are not staffed to address the safety issues associated with up to 40,000 people traveling through the community each day. I urge ESD to make commitments to ensure that our local police and fire departments have ample funding and staffing resources to keep our community safe.

Finally, I am concerned about our local schools. There would be heavy use of space, including the construction of a new power station, adjacent to Floral Park-Bellerose School. I strongly urge ESD to move this power station as far away from the school and the residential area as possible. Create a buffer between the park and the school for our children.

I would like to close by noting that, in the Purpose and Need Statement for the DEIS, ESD states that one of its objectives is to, “Benefit the neighborhoods and communities adjacent to and surrounding Belmont Park.” ESD’s proposed project will not achieve this objective—it will do more harm to our community than good. I urge ESD to scale back the size of the project. It is simply too big.

I will be submitting written comments for the record. Thank you again for your time.