

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 10, 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. I spoke during the last two evenings of public hearings, and I would like to thank you for providing me with the opportunity to speak again tonight.

My name is Michael Culotta, and my wife, my daughter, and I are residents of Floral Park. I would like to highlight and re-emphasize some significant concerns that I have with the Belmont Project.

Over the last three days, you have heard testimony from my neighbors voicing their concerns and opposition to the size of this project. It is simply too big—the local infrastructure and public resources cannot support the size of the proposed development. I strongly urge ESD to scale back the size of the project.

I am concerned with ESD's compliance with the Urban Development Corporation (UDC) Act, under which it operates. First, the UDC Act requires that ESD "give primary consideration to local needs and desires." The Belmont Park redevelopment does not prioritize local needs. It will result in significant adverse impacts on the local community. Instead, ESD's proposal seems to prioritize the needs of the private developers who would financially benefit the most from this project, and those developers are not residents of the community surrounding Belmont Park.

Second, the UDC Act requires ESD to "foster local initiative and participation in connection with the planning and development of its projects." With that requirement in mind, I would like to note that the 700-page DEIS, along with hundreds of pages of technical appendices, was issued by ESD during the busy holiday season. I respectfully request ESD to extend the public comment period beyond February 11, 2019, to give this community a meaningful opportunity to review and comment upon this project.

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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.” The proposed Belmont Park redevelopment will not achieve this objective. It would harm the communities surrounding Belmont Park by bringing significant adverse traffic, noise, air quality, and safety impacts. ESD admits in the DEIS that it cannot mitigate these impacts—they would be lasting. I strongly urge ESD to eliminate the cause of these impacts by scaling back the size of this project.

It is imperative that the Belmont Park Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) Station receives improvements to make it a fully functioning transportation hub throughout the year. It must directly accommodate regular daily ridership traveling from both the East and West ends of Long Island. ESD and LIRR are both arms of the State, and they must work together on this effort.

I strongly urge ESD to eliminate the shopping mall and the overall 435,000 square feet of retail space from its proposal, which by some estimates, may bring nearly 20,000 people per day through our village. 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.

I strongly urge ESD to study an alternative that involves an arena only. I urge ESD to locate parking lots south of Hempstead Turnpike, which was part of ESD’s original proposal. I urge ESD to prohibit the use of the East and North Lots on Site A, given their close proximity to homes and Floral Park-Bellerose School and Floral Park Memorial High School. Keep the proposed power station as far away from Floral Park-Bellerose School as possible. Close Plainfield Avenue to post-event traffic. I also urge ESD to conduct a meaningful traffic study that analyzes impacts on the entire length of the heavily congested Cross Island Parkway.

Finally, I strongly urge ESD to keep our community safe. Emergency response times would be significantly impacted, and this project would place a huge strain on the resources of the local Police and Fire Departments in Floral Park and the surrounding communities. They are not staffed to address the safety issues associated with tens of thousands of people traveling through the community each day as a result of this project. I urge ESD to ensure that our local police and fire departments have ample funding and staffing to keep our community safe.

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