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**An unfinished Hudson River Park needs you**

By Tom Fox

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The Hudson River Park, the planned 4.5-mile, \$400 million waterfront park that promises to be the 21st century equivalent of Central Park, is now at a critical crossroad. The public participation process that created the park is faltering, and with only half the park completed, funding runs out next year.

The park was conceived at the end of a 15-year struggle that pitted government, business and construction interests that wanted to fill in the river against environmentalists and community residents who fought to stop them.

In 1987, both sides decided to work together to ensure the redevelopment of the waterfront. For the next 15 years, New Yorkers from all walks of life worked with the city and state. They secured \$200 million for park construction. They created a plan for the park and legislation to protect it, removed tow pounds and bus garages. They created a bike path and Chelsea Piers and completed the first segments of the park in Greenwich Village and Clinton.

Recently, however, budget, program and planning decisions have been made behind closed doors and progress on the park has slowed. Left to be done are the entire Tribeca and Chelsea sections, from Battery Place to Houston St., and from Little West 12th St. to 26th St.

Public calls for budget information and construction progress have gone unanswered. No plans have been made to move the salt piles and sanitation garages that the Hudson River Park Act requires be moved by this month. The redevelopment of Pier 40 at Houston St., which has broad public support and is mandated by the act, has been postponed, while deals made in private threaten to allow the opening of commercial marinas and skating facilities that were not in the plan.

Without a return to the meaningful public participation that created the park, concerns and controversy will grow. The public must put the pressure on to raise the remaining \$200 million to finish the park. Part of the money could come from the Lower Manhattan Development Corp. and another portion from the proposed Hudson Yards project.

Without the involvement of the broad range of individuals and institutions, it will be difficult to complete the park. That the Hudson River Park exists at all is evidence of the power of public participation.

It's time to return to the process that created the park, or it will take twice as long to build and it won't be half as great as we all envisioned.

*Fox is president of New York Water Taxi.*