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May 22, 2022

To: Honorable Governor of New York, Kathleen Hochul

Re: Demolition and Replacement of Wagner Park within the Battery Park City Campus Resiliency Plan, managed and designed by BPCA and AECOM

Dear Governor Hochul,

It has come to my attention that a plan is moving swiftly ahead that will demolish and replace Wagner Park, at the southern tip of Battery Park City. This project appears to be the first project to be implemented within the Battery Park City Campus Resiliency Plan.

With my full support of the state, city, and borough efforts to effectively and thoughtfully respond to the impacts of climate change and sea level rise, through resiliency projects along the Manhattan coast, I must also lend my full support to the culture of public spaces and architectural gems that may come under threat in the city. There is perhaps no greater work of public space, in its landscape and architecture, than Wagner Park. This is a masterpiece, invented by landscape firm OLIN and architecture firm Machado Silvetti, in the mid-90's and completed and opened to much local and international applause.

In the November 24th, 1996 edition of the New York Time, the eminent architectural critic Paul Goldberger called Wagner Park “one of the finest public space New York has seen in a generation”. He went on to write that “What is most important is that every aspect of this design emerges from the realities of the park’s surroundings – the waterfront, the Statue of Liberty, the rest of Battery Park City and lower Manhattan- and connects to the imperatives of human use.” As such this park as designed, constructed, and is in keeping with the best of public spaces in New York City including Central Park, Washington Square Park, and Union Square Park where the character and culture of the city are found on vibrant display.

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Admittedly, for me, the park has additional meaning. I was a young architect working with Rodolfo Machado and Jorge Silvetti in their Boston office during the design of this project. Having studied under Rodolfo at the Rhode Island School of Design, and then working with him and Jorge, I, along with too many to number of my architectural colleagues, were first-hand witnesses to an extraordinary contribution to the field of architecture, a working theory and invention in architecture that Machado and Silvetti termed Unprecedented Realism. Without distracting from the main issue, I simply want to say that this theory and its authors, Rodolfo Machado and Jorge Silvetti, has been a central part of architectural education and thought in this country for now multiple decades, and Wagner Park. Rodolfo Machado even says, “the ideas of Unprecedented Realism deeply permeate Wagner Park and it, perhaps, is the building in which we got closest to the materialization of these ideas.”

Wagner Park, in its landscape and most certainly in its architecture, stands shoulder to shoulder with the finest cultural and physical contributions to New York. It is both a civic frame, and a public space; a monument and an invitation; an architectural theory, and an exquisitely crafted pavilion.

I write this letter in support of the Battery Park City Neighborhood Association’s request to pause the current project and give time for third-party reviews, additional community input, and an opportunity for alternative ideas that might save and or at least better salvage the values of this important public space and iconic architecture.

With sincerity and gratitude for your time and consideration,

Nader Tehrani, Dean
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