

Congress approves \$9M for cleanup at New Rochelle's Davids Island

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THE JOURNAL NEWS

(Original publication: October 4, 2006)

NEW ROCHELLE — Congress has approved an additional \$9 million for the cleanup of Davids Island, taking a large stride toward preparing the 78-acre island to be used again. That brings the total set aside to remove the rubble of buildings on the former Army post to \$18.1 million — close to the \$20.5 million total the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers estimated the work would cost.

However, the Army Corps of Engineers is revising the estimate; a new number is expected in November, said Gregory Goepfert, project manager for the cleanup. New Rochelle Mayor Noam Bramson and Westchester County Executive Andrew Spano praised Rep. Nita Lowey, D-Harrison, for securing the funds approved last week in the \$448 billion defense budget for 2006-07.

"Once again, Congresswoman Lowey has come through in spectacular fashion for the people of New Rochelle and Westchester County," said Bramson, who has worked as a consultant for Lowey.

For years, the city has planned to sell the island to Westchester County for a park. No contract was signed and a preliminary agreement has expired, City Manager Charles Strome III said.

Bramson said he still supported the idea, but the \$6.5 million price agreed to several years ago by then-Mayor Timothy Itoni and Spano was up for negotiation. Spano spokeswoman Donna Greene said Spano was still working with the original.

"Six million is the number that has been on the table, and that's all we have to say on it at this point," she said.

"These funds will allow us to continue the important work to make Davids Island safe and accessible once again," she said in a statement.

Richard Hoffman, Lowey's Republican opponent in next month's election, said he supported the project but questioned whether the money should be spent before the plans were defined more completely.

"We're spending a lot of money without knowing what the end result is going to be," he said. If a private developer were to buy the island, he or she would gain from the tax-funded cleanup, he said, adding, "Is that what federal tax dollars should be spent on?"

Bramson said there were no plans on the table for private development on the island. The Army Corps of Engineers continues to clear away buildings deemed to have no historical significance, Goepfert said.

He said the Corps of Engineers would not allocate \$2.4 million from a separate fund to clean up former defense sites, as expected.

Funds in the program for cleaning up contamination are low, he said.

Goepfert did not know if the removal of 93 buildings on the island, begun last year, would take longer than the eight years originally projected.

New Rochelle Commissioner of Public Works Jeffrey Coleman said Tetra Tech, the same company testing for archaeological sites on the island now, had been hired to look for contaminants, a job expected to cost \$500,000 to \$1 million.

The state will cover most of that cost, with the city and county paying 5 percent, he said.

The city would seek state funding to clean whatever pollution Tetra Tech may find, he said.