



August 26, 2019

City of Plattsburgh Common Council
c/o Hon. Colin L. Read
City Hall
41 City Hall Place
Plattsburgh, New York 12901

Re: City of Plattsburgh Downtown Area Improvement Projects Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement (DGEIS) Draft Scoping Document Comments

Dear Mayor Read and City of Plattsburgh Common Council:

Our firm is been retained by the Plattsburgh Citizens Coalition, Inc., a not for profit coalition and its members, of concerned citizens, property owners, and business owners in the City of Plattsburgh relative to the City's proposed development plans with Prime Plattsburgh, LLC. In reviewing the "Development Agreement" between the City of Plattsburgh and Prime Plattsburgh, LLC dated March 29, 2019 (hereinafter the "Agreement"), we believe this Agreement is a nullity. The City of Plattsburgh is without power to convey the waterfront property, or any portion of it, identified in the Agreement broadly as "40 Bridge Street and 22 Durkee Street" (hereinafter the "Properties").

The Properties that are subject to the Agreement are identified by Tax Map Parcels 207.20-1-14 and 207.20-1-15. Both of these parcels lie along the Saranac River, and therefore constitute, by law, "water front" properties. The City may not legally convey these Properties.

Pursuant to New York General City Law §20(2), a city is empowered to: "***To take, purchase, hold and lease real...property within...the limits of the city;..., and to sell and convey the same, but the rights of a city in and to its water front,...streets,...avenues, parks, and all other public places, are hereby declared to be inalienable, except in the cases provided for by subdivision seven of this section.***" ***Emphasis added.*** In this instance, New York General City Law §20(7) included in the foregoing exception does not apply as there connection to any of the exceptions contained therein.

There is no question that this river front property, which includes the entirety of the Properties, constitutes “water front” as set forth in New York General City Law §20(2). See for example, Gladsky v. City of Glen Cove, 164 A.D.2d 567, 2nd Dept. 1991 for a thorough discussion of this issue now posed to the City of Plattsburgh.

- As in this instance, the City of Glen Cove attempted to convey a portion of property that included “frontage on Glen Cove Creed”. *Id.* at 567.
- The question of whether or not the property in Glen Cove, as with the property along the Saranac River here, had ever been “used, acquired or dedicated” to public purpose is irrelevant. “*While other forms of City-owned property may be converted to public use and thereby be rendered inalienable under the statute, waterfront property has been expressly declared to be inalienable, regardless of the manner in which the property is used. Although we recognize that the statutory restriction against the alienation of certain municipal property emanates, to a large extent, from the “public trust” doctrine (see, Matter of Lake George Steamboat Co. v. Blais, 30 N.Y.2d 48, 330 N.Y.S.2d 336, 281 N.E.2d 147; Brooklyn Park Commrs. v. Armstrong, 45 N.Y. 234, supra; Matter of Central Parkway, 140 Misc. 727, 729–730, 251 N.Y.S. 577; Gewirtz v. City of Long Beach, 69 Misc.2d 763, 330 N.Y.S.2d 495, aff’d 45 A.D.2d 841, 358 N.Y.S.2d 957) the Legislature did not see fit to include a public-use limitation in the statute, and we decline to engraft such a limitation in a statute which is otherwise clear and unequivocal on its face.*” *Id.* at 571. **Emphasis added.** Thus, in this instance, we need not delve into whether or not the City ever “dedicated” this property to protection under the public trust doctrine. New York General City Law §20(2) preempts that decision or action.’
- The exceptions of New York General City Law §20(7) do not include alienation of water front property. See again, Gladsky: “*Nor does General City Law § 20(7), upon which the plaintiff relies, compel a contrary result. This subdivision creates a “discontinuance” exception to the statute’s blanket prohibition against the alienability of public property by empowering a municipality to “lay out, establish, construct, maintain and operate markets, parks, playgrounds and public places, and upon the discontinuance thereof to sell and convey the same” (emphasis supplied). Notably absent from the enumeration of the type of property which may be freely sold by a municipality upon the discontinuance of its public use is waterfront property. The reason for this absence is clear—waterfront property, as we have noted, is entitled to special protection by virtue of its geographical location rather than by virtue of its use. Unlike a public playground, which may cease to be a playground if its use is altered, waterfront property is intrinsically unique. That the discontinuance exception does not, and should not, apply to waterfront property becomes all the more compelling given the significant ecological, scenic, and aesthetic qualities inherent in it.*” **Emphasis added.**

In addition, it is also noted that the parking lot here may very well also be protected by the public trust doctrine, in addition to the issues surrounding New York General City Law §20(2) above. See generally 10 East Realty, LLC v. Incorporated Village of Valley Stream, 49 A.D.3d 764, Second Department 2008, as well as the related 10 East Realty cases at 17 A.D.3d 474, 49 A.D. 3d 770. Although the Second Department found in the case of the village in 10 East Realty that

the public trust doctrine was not violated by the conveyance of a parking lot there, here, we have a bit of a different scenario. In the City of Plattsburgh, this parking lot, and indeed other similar parking lots within the downtown parking district, are held for the benefit of that parking district. Taxpayers are charged a special tax for the maintenance, repair and upkeep of those parking lots, evidencing an intention by the City of Plattsburgh to hold those public parking spaces in trust for this district. Thus, no parking property may be alienated without addressing the underlying special taxing district.

The continuing wrong evidenced by the Agreement in violation of New York General City Law §20(2) must be reversed. The City of Plattsburgh does not possess the legal authority to enter into the Agreement.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Fuller', written in a cursive style.

Matthew F. Fuller, Esq.

mfuller@meyerfuller.com

cc: Plattsburgh Citizens Coalition, Inc.