



REBECCA A. SEAWRIGHT  
Assembly Member 76<sup>th</sup> District

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NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY MEMBER REBECCA A. SEAWRIGHT  
TESTIMONY TO THE NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC DESIGN COMMISSION  
81<sup>ST</sup> STREET PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE  
MONDAY, APRIL 20, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony regarding the proposed 81<sup>st</sup> Street Pedestrian Bridge. After much discussion with constituents and careful analysis of the proposals for the 81<sup>st</sup> Street Pedestrian Bridge, I respectfully ask that the Public Design Commission of the City of New York postpone its decision until considering a number of suggested aesthetic changes that will make the bridge a better reflection of the character and quality of the structures surrounding it.

The community is asking for three minor modifications to design that I believe will improve the look of the bridge for those who will regularly view and use it. The first modification request is that a glass or lucite viewing window be added so that pedestrians using the bridge may pause to take advantage of a rare unobstructed view of the East River. The current design, consisting of an expanse of plain 1'x1' aperture metal fencing towering 8 feet high, will impede these views and is a missed opportunity to create a pedestrian bridge that people will truly enjoy crossing.

In this vein, the second modification request is that a more creative approach to fencing be considered. The proposed utilitarian metal fencing creates a stark contrast between the look of the bridge and the traditionally charming appearance of the neighborhood overlooking it. I believe that an equally practical, but more visually appealing scene can be created with just a few thoughtful alterations.

The third modification request is that the light poles chosen have a classic look. Again, the community would like the bridge to better blend with the structures surrounding the bridge. There is also worry that the bulbs will become bothersome to those with windows overlooking the pedestrian bridge. I hope that the Commission will address these concerns.

As you will undoubtedly hear today, this project has been met with community resistance since 2008 when Community Board 8 and the East 79<sup>th</sup> Street Neighborhood Association both urged the Department of Transportation (DOT) and Department of Design and Construction (DDC) to alter the plans for the bridge so that it better blended with the structures surrounding it. Since then, the community has continued to call for changes, all of which the City has ignored or refused.

Recent discussions with the Department of Parks and Recreation, DOT, DDC and members of the community have been increasingly productive. After much communication, there is hope that, with more time, the City and the community will be able to come to a compromise.

While I appreciate the City's desire for uniformity, I believe it is important to consider the uniqueness of the community in which this bridge is being placed. This City – both the structures and people within it – is anything but cookie-cutter. To insist that the 81<sup>st</sup> Street Pedestrian Bridge look like every other pedestrian bridge in the City is disservice to current and future residents of Manhattan and all of New York City.

As ferry service expands, the shoreline of this City becomes increasingly visible. As an equally important face of Manhattan, changes to the shoreline should be as carefully deliberated as changes to the skyline. The 81<sup>st</sup> Street Pedestrian Bridge should be a welcoming structure, designed in a manner that reflects the splendor of what lies behind it.

It is my hope that the Public Design Commission, when coming to its decision, will consider the look of the neighborhood in which the bridge is being placed and will postpone its decision until a more aesthetically appropriate bridge design is agreed upon by the City and community.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rebecca A. Seawright". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Assembly Member Rebecca A. Seawright, 76<sup>th</sup> AD