

From: [Bethany Wall](#)
To: [Stevens, Karen](#)
Subject: Comments related to 9/28 public meeting (Docket No. AB-167, Sub. no. 1189X)
Date: Wednesday, September 27, 2023 4:26:27 AM

Hello Karen,

I am registered for this Thursday's Online Public Meeting on National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 re Conrail's Proposed Abandonment of Harsimus Branch (Docket No. AB-167, Sub. no. 1189X).

Because I will be in a time zone that prevents my attending (I'm guessing a meeting recording will be sent to registrants/available soon after the meeting?), I am submitting my comments ahead of time. Please consider them part of the public record for this meeting.

With appreciation, Bethany Wall

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My name is Bethany Wall. I've lived in Jersey City since 2005 and am grateful for the opportunity to register my perspective as part of this process. When I first arrived in JC, I was struck by the massive stone Embankment structure with signs of life and habitat overflowing the top. Intrigued, I asked the realtor showing me around what it was, and he was vague in his response: *"I'm not quite sure... I think there was talk they were going to try to do something with it?"*

The next I heard, the Embankment property had been "sold" by Conrail in what proved to be an unlawful sale, since the property had not been properly abandoned. My first point is that this illegal act is not even mentioned in the MOA. Unacceptable. It is my strong view that Conrail must be held accountable for selling portions of the Harsimus Branch, not rewarded.

Today, nearly everyone I speak with views the Embankment a resource and a historic opportunity to be tapped for the benefit of a rapidly growing urban area. While they may not yet be aware of its full history – how it came to be built, and what it represents – they immediately understand the ways in which it stands as an asset.

The Embankment as it stands today fosters healthier air just blocks from the Holland Tunnel, with its 100,000+ cars daily passing through. It absorbs stormwater in a flood-prone town with infrastructure featuring a combined sewer overflow system that dumps waste along with excess rainwater into the Hudson River during strong storms – which are, as we all know, increasing. It is habitat for resident and migrating birds, pollinators, and other members of a thriving ecosystem – an ecosystem of which we humans are only one part. And while our Jersey City ecosystem may not quite be thriving just yet, the Embankment's mighty presence

moves us further in that direction.

In short, the Embankment promotes a more livable city and has the potential to build, strengthen and serve the Jersey City community even more dramatically as its preservation and adaptive reuse hits stride in the future.

Over my nearly 19 years in Jersey City, the pace of development has been astounding. I've wondered, and asked aloud to anyone who would listen, how we, as a municipality, are actively addressing the incredible stresses placed on an aging infrastructure through this rapid development. To ignore an important facet of the sustainability and livability puzzle that the Embankment represents is to miss the big picture by miles.

The final important point I'd like to make relates to the specific reason for this public meeting today (woefully late in the process, might I add, since early and continuing public engagement is a *requirement* of the process): **If the STB claims lack of jurisdiction due to the unlawful sale, this will set a truly awful precedent.** It will mean that other railroad companies will have carte blanche to do the same. The City and its citizens have worked too hard for too long ensuring that the Harsimus Branch is a respected, contributing facet of our City to have a draft MOA that undermines all of our efforts.

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