

**Statement
By
Congressman Eliot Engel
of
New York**

**House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and Related
Agencies**

“Member’s Day” Hearing

April 15, 2010

Chairman Olver and Ranking Member Latham,

Thank you for holding today’s hearing and for the opportunity to discuss some of my priorities for New York’s 17th District in the Fiscal Year 2011 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Bill.

The first project I would like to discuss, which is also my number one priority across all subcommittees, is the revitalization of Memorial Field Stadium in Mount Vernon, NY. The \$3,000,000 in requested funds would allow the City of Mount Vernon to renovate a local landmark, including building a multi-sport synthetic turf field surface, an eight lane track, steeplechase, grandstand seating for 3,900 people, a side grass field area, and a multi-purpose community room. A renovated

Memorial Field would greatly contribute to the health and wellness of the community, as well as providing for economic revitalization.

Built in 1930, Memorial Field is a historic stadium for the City of Mount Vernon, a place which older generations hold in fond memory. It would be a good use of funds to revitalize the stadium, so that future generations can enjoy local athletic events, fairs, festivals, concerts, and other community events. It is hoped that the renovations to the stadium will also once again attract a minor league baseball or football team, providing a much needed economic boost to the area.

The Memorial Field Stadium renovation project is located in an area that has experienced consistent economic distress. Accordingly, any avenue toward providing economic development should be pursued. When I thought about ways to obtain federal assistance for this project, through the appropriations process this year, I looked at initiatives from the past, including a similar local stadium renovation in New Orleans several years ago where HUD economic development funds were used.

As you are aware, some years back, the EDI program had a couple of benchmarks which potential initiatives were expected to meet: one was whether or not the project would contribute to improving employment numbers in the target area and, thus, contribute to local economic development; the second benchmark was whether or not the project would contribute to the local tax base – either through the added workers

paying taxes and/or the assisted project paying or otherwise contributing to the local tax base through sales of merchandise, for example. In the case of this project, it will add to the employment base and it will expand the local tax base.

In the guidance provided by the subcommittee, it stipulates that EDI funds should, among other criteria, go for construction, rehabilitation and “hard-cost” activities associated with public projects. Funds for this project would most certainly be used for hard-cost activities in the rehabilitation process for the stadium.

The historic architecture of Memorial Field Stadium consists of a brick and limestone grandstand building with a series of twelve Romanesque arches flanking either side of the main entrance. These arches are now crumbling, with flaking paint, and the main entrance boarded up. It is a sad state of affairs that has let this grand stadium, once a pride of the City of Mount Vernon, into that wreck that it is today. I urge the Subcommittee to fully fund my request to provide a symbol of wellness and definitive economic resurgence to the community.

The second project I would like to request is \$200,000 to renovate the Nepperhan Community Center, located in Yonkers, NY. The funding would allow for renovations of the main level of the center, which has served the community for over 68 years. The programs offered at the Nepperhan Community Center include assistance to children and

families, youth sports, tutoring, and veterans' services, among many others designed to provide life skills to people of all ages. The community of Yonkers deserves to have a safe and modern center for improvement of their residents.

I would also like to request the Subcommittee fully fund my request to provide \$350,000 to Joseph's Home (Homes for Heroes) to rehabilitate an existing garage located on the property of a former vacant Army Reserve Center into a community room for use of all veterans in Rockland County. It is fitting that we would now use this land to create homes and a gathering place for veterans who have risked their lives to protect us, and are doing so today in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The next project I would like to request is \$959,000 for the Riverspace Arts Center in Nyack, NY. The funding will be used to advance the promotion of community development and the building of an Arts and Educational center in downtown Nyack, by conducting studies, architectural and design, and acquisition costs to maintain site control. Restoring the heart of Nyack's downtown by building an outstanding arts, entertainment, and education center will spur the creation of new housing and new businesses.

The final project I would like to discuss with the subcommittee today is \$500,000 for the Haitian American Cultural and Social Organization (HACSO) to develop a cultural center for recent immigrants and

refugees to better deliver social and health related services. HACSO has been in existence for the over 35 years and the first organization specializing in serving Haitian immigrants in Rockland County. In the last 5 years, even more so since the earthquake in January, the agency has seen a tremendous increase in its clientele to include individuals, families, and businesses utilizing the current and existing programs, but also bringing an array of new sets of unmet needs that are arising. I would urge the subcommittee to fully fund this request.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development today. I look forward to working with you and answering any questions you may have on my requested projects.