Date: September 28, 2023

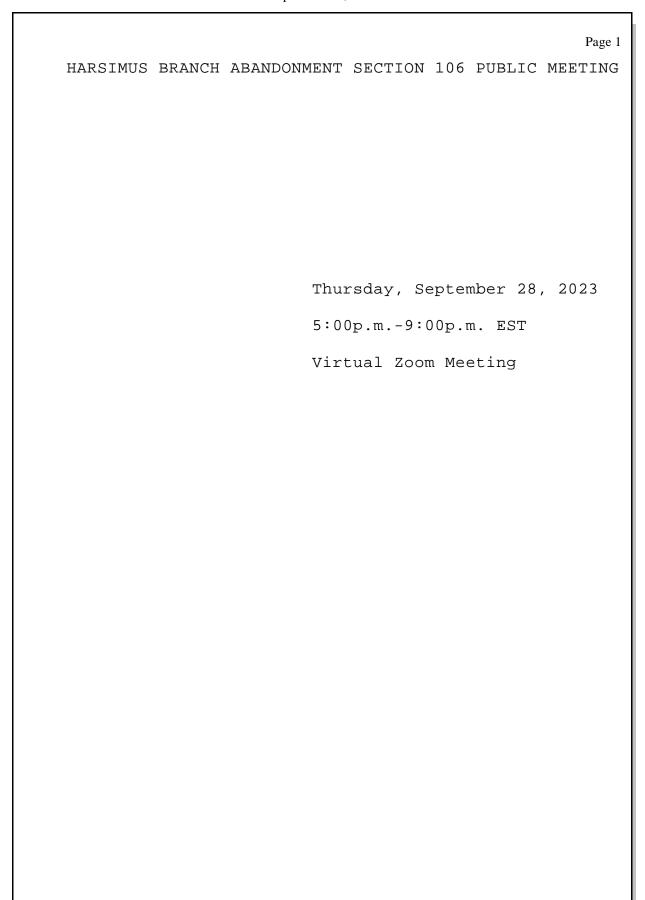
Case: Harsimus Branch Abandonment Section 106 Public Meeting



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	Page 2
1	PROCEEDINGS
2	5:03 p.m.
3	MR. TABACHNICK: All right. Good
4	afternoon everybody, and thank you very much for
5	joining us. Welcome to the Harsimus Branch
6	Abandonment, Section 106 Public Meeting. Docket
7	Number AB167, Sub Number 1189X.
8	My name is Alan Tabachnick, and I'm the
9	Federal Preservation Officer in the Surface
10	Transportation Board's Office of Environmental
11	Analysis. The purpose of this meeting is to explain
12	the role of the Surface Transportation Board, and to
13	update the public on the background of this case,
14	where we are in the Section 106 process, and next
15	steps.
16	We have close to well as of half an
17	hour ago we have close to 400 folks registered for
18	the meeting, and I want to thank everyone for making
19	time to be with us today. Next slide please.
20	So the agenda for today's meeting is
21	fairly simple. We'll start with a presentation that
22	will cover the role of the Surface Transportation

Page 3 Board, and then transition into an update on the 2 Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act 3 process on the Harsimus Branch Abandonment case. After the presentation we will be moving 5 into the public comment portion of the meeting, and 6 we're here to listen, and are looking forward to 7 hearing from many of you today. Finally, we will wrap up and discuss next steps. I want to let everyone know that this meeting is being recorded. 10 We also have a court reporter here, who will prepare 11 a transcript, and ensure that the transcript of this 12 meeting is accurate. 13 And this transcript will be publicly 14 available on our website once it has been completed. 15 Next slide please. I think it is useful for everyone 16 to understand our agency's role in this case, the 17 proposed Harsimus Branch Abandonment. 18 The Surface Transportation Board is a 19 federal, bipartisan, independent Board with broad 20 economic, regulatory oversight of railroads, 21 including the rates, service, construction, 22 acquisition and operation and abandonment of rail

The Board decides whether to authorize the lines. 2 abandonment of a rail line, allowing the railroad to 3 remove the line from interstate rail network, and 4 end regulation by the Board. 5 Before deciding whether to approve an 6 abandonment, the Board must comply with the National 7 Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA, and Section 106 of 8 the National Historic Preservation Act. Next slide 9 please. 10 Under the Board's environmental rules, 11 compliance with NEPA and Section 106 is delegated to 12 the Office of Environmental Analysis, or OEA, and 13 that's my office. Following the end of the NEPA and 14 Section 106 processes, the Board decides whether to 15 deny an abandonment, or approve an abandonment with 16 appropriate conditions. 17 When making its final decision, the Board 18 considers the entire record, including the full 19 environmental record, and all analysis and 20 consultation undertaken under Section 106. Now that 21 I've provided an overview of the Board's role in 22 abandonment proceedings, I now want to turn the focus

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 m 1}$ to the Section 106 process in this case, and where we
- ² are today. Next slide please.
- In 2009, Conrail sought authority from the
- 4 Board to abandon the approximately 1.36 mile rail
- 5 line known as the Harsimus Branch in Jersey City.
- 6 The graphic here depicts the location of the Harsimus
- 7 Branch from East of Washington Street to
- 8 approximately Waldo Avenue on the west.
- The six blocks visible in light green in
- 10 the center of the graphic comprise the Harsimus
- 11 Branch embankment, with which we are all so familiar.
- 12 Next slide please. As some of you may know, Section
- 13 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act sets
- 14 forth a four step process an agency must go through
- in order to take into account the effects of its
- 16 action on historic properties.
- 17 These steps include initiation,
- identification, assessment of effects, and then
- 19 resolution of adverse effects. All of these steps
- 20 involve outreach and communication with the Section
- 21 106, the Consulting parties and the public. For the
- 22 proposed Harsimus Branch Abandonment, the Section 106

Page 6 process was initiated, the undertaking was 2 established, and the area of potential effects or 3 APE was developed, and consulting parties were 4 identified. Next slide please. OEA has been working with a large number 6 of Section 106 consulting parties over many years as this slide shows. Most recently, this past summer, after our June 8th meeting, we've added the Bergen Arches Preservation Coalition, Bike JC, and Historic 10 Jersey City and Harsimus Cemetery, and the National 11 Trust for Historic Preservation to our consulting 12 parties list. 13 Consultation efforts are continuing not only with the 29 consulting parties, but also with 15 the larger community. Next slide please. OEA 16 identified 19 historic properties within the area of 17 potential effects, including the Harsimus Branch 18 Railroad, the embankment, and numerous historic 19 districts and individual properties. 20 We then conducted an effects assessment, 21 and determined that the proposed abandonment could 22 potentially have an adverse effect on historic

Page 7 1 properties. We are now in step 4 of the Section 106 2 process, working to address the potential adverse 3 effects. And we determined that the development of 4 an agreement document, specifically a memorandum of 5 agreement, or MOA, was the best approach. 6 An MOA is a legal document that contains 7 all the commitments made to address a project's 8 adverse effects, and it is prepared at the end of the Section 106 process. Next slide please. As part of 10 this Section 106 process, we're working to address 11 the potential adverse effects, but it should be noted 12 that the Board's ability to mitigate adverse effects 13 is limited. 14 It's important to understand that if the 15 Board authorizes abandonment, and Conrail abandons 16 the line, the privately owned Harsimus Branch would be removed from the interstate rail system, and the 17 18 Board's jurisdiction over the Harsimus Branch would 19 end. 20 This means that the Board has no control 21 over any changes, or to the development of the

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Harsimus Branch after it is abandoned. The Board

Page 8 cannot impose historic conditions, limiting the 2 use, sale or development of rail properties after 3 abandonment. And documentation is generally the only historic mitigation that the Board can unilaterally 5 impose. Next slide please. 6 And as seen in this slide, documentation is defined broadly, and documentation of historic 8 resources can include the following: Historic resource surveys; photography, for example, 10 you know, high definition digital photography, 11 preparation of technical reports, the video 12 documentation and interpretative signage. 13 A railroad may voluntarily agree to 14 additional historic mitigation measures beyond 15 documentation, but the Board generally cannot impose 16 historic mitigation measures other than documentation 17 without the railroad's agreement. Next slide please. 18 The historic mitigation measures set forth 19 in a legally binding agreement, in this case a 20 memorandum of agreement executed by the Board, the 21 State Historic Preservation Office, or SHPO, the 22 railroad applicant, and the Advisory Council on

Page 9 Historic Preservation, or ACHP, along with the input 2 from the consulting parties. 3 The railroad applicant in this case, 4 Conrail, is legally responsible for carrying out 5 these measures under the direction, review and 6 approval of OEA. The Board has been working for several years to negotiate an appropriate MOA. Once a final MOA has been executed by the required signatories, the Section 106 process will be 10 complete. Next slide please. 11 The current draft MOA, which is publicly 12 available on our website, stipulates that Conrail 13 would be required to prepare and publish extensive and detailed documentation of the Harsimus Branch 15 and embankment, prepare and fabricate at least six 16 large interpretative sign panels that would 17 illustrate the history and significance of the rail 18 line, historic districts and properties in the area, 19 and important historic themes in the history of 20 Jersey City. 21 Develop a high-quality webpage on the 22 history and significance of the Harsimus Branch and

- embankment, as well as adjacent historic properties
- and districts, and this would be hosted on a website
- 3 identified through this consultation process. And
- 4 Conrail would also develop a high-quality digital
- 5 video explaining the importance of the Harsimus
- 6 Branch and embankment, and potentially other
- ⁷ important resources or themes.
- 8 This would also be developed through the
- 9 consultation process. Following the meeting today,
- 10 OEA will review all of the comments received, both
- during this meeting and submitted afterwards, and
- 12 prepare a final MOA. Now I'd like to move into the
- 13 public comment portion of our meeting. Next slide
- 14 please.
- 15 Again, I want to thank everybody for
- 16 attending. We have now I guess about 170
- 17 participants in the meeting, which is great.
- 18 Letting people in as they login. So thank you to
- 19 those who reached out in advance to register, and to
- 20 speak during this meeting. As of four o'clock today,
- or 4:15, we have close to 400. Okay, sorry about
- that, it wasn't me.

Page 11 We have close to 400 people registered for 2 today's meeting, and over 60 are signed up in advance 3 to provide comments. We're really pleased to have so much interest in this case, and looking forward to 5 hearing from you. Each speaker will have three 6 minutes to provide their comments. In order to keep 7 everyone within their allotted timeframe, there will be a time clock posted, so each of you can keep track of your time while you speak. 10 Please stay within the time limit. 11 go over your time, you will be muted, so we have 12 enough time for everyone to speak. I also want to 13 note that speakers may comment only once. We're 14 trying our best to give everybody as much time and get 15 as many of you speakers in here as possible within 16 our four hour window. 17 The pre-registered speakers will be called 18 upon first in the order that they signed up. After 19 the pre-registered speakers have finished, we will 20 allow comments from the other attendees as time 21 allows. Attendees who wish to speak will need to 22 raise their hands in the Zoom meeting, and will be

- 1 called upon by the moderator. Well, I will call upon
- you. I'm the moderator.
- At that time the speaker will be unmuted.
- 4 We encourage each speaker to clearly state their name
- 5 at the beginning of their remarks. I also want to
- 6 remind speakers that you will have the opportunity to
- 7 utilize your camera at that time if you wish. We
- will do our best to ensure that everyone who wants to
- 9 speak has that opportunity.
- And again, we established the four hour
- timeframe for this meeting to allow for as many
- 12 speakers as possible. In addition to oral comments,
- written comments are welcome. We will review all
- oral and written comments, and they will be included
- 15 as part of the record in this case. And I will
- provide more information on how to submit written
- 17 comments at the end of the meeting. Next slide
- 18 please.
- We do appreciate everyone taking the time
- to be with us tonight. We realize everyone won't be
- here for the entire meeting, some people will come
- 22 early, some people will come later. We will do our best

- 1 to get everybody -- give everybody the opportunity to
- 2 speak. And we thank you for your interest in this
- proposed Harsimus Branch Abandonment, and look
- 4 forward to hearing your comments.
- We're now going to go through the list of
- 6 the pre-registered commenters, generally in the order
- ⁷ that they signed up to speak. I will remind folks to
- 8 please state your name, so the court reporter could
- 9 accurately keep track of the comments. And our first
- 10 speaker tonight, and I'll apologize in advance if I
- mispronounce anybody's last name.
- 12 I'll do my best to not mess up anyone's
- 13 last names. My last name is Tabachnick, and people
- mess it up all the time. I don't even pay attention
- 15 anymore. So our first speaker is Anne Percoco.
- 16 Anne?
- MS. PERCOCO: The sale of part of the
- 18 Harsimus Branch is unlawful, and the STB needs to
- 19 hold Conrail responsible for that. Otherwise, it is
- setting a powerful precedent, and in fact, an
- 21 endorsement of future sales of other historic
- 22 properties. Furthermore, documentation and signage

- 1 are not mitigation. The only way to mitigate is to
- 2 preserve the embankment.
- And the embankment provides a lot of
- 4 ecological benefits and quality of life benefits for
- its neighbors, and documentation won't do anything
- 6 for that. Okay. Thank you.
- 7 MR. TABACHNICK: Oh. Thank you. Our next
- 8 speaker is Claire Perrault.
- 9 MS. PERRAULT: Yes. Oh.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you.
- MS. PERRAULT: I can't even get in the
- 12 video.
- MR. CROSS: We can see you Claire.
- MS. PERRAULT: Okay. I can't seem to get
- 15 the video. My camera won't come on.
- MR. CROSS: Claire, we can see you.
- 17 You're fine. Go ahead.
- MS. PERRAULT: Okay. I'm Claire Perrault,
- 19 resident of Harsimus Cove National Historic District
- 20 for 43 years. My house is in a row of houses built
- 21 by the first mayor of Jersey City in 1850. The
- 22 Harsimus embankment is the district's northern

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 m l}$ border, and thus has shaped our neighborhood. Any
- 2 harm to it, is harm to the whole district, not
- 3 commensurate to the other historic sites and
- 4 districts along it.
- 5 As Conrail's sale to a developer was
- 6 indisputably unlawful, the STB should hold it
- 7 accountable. As administrator of the National
- 8 Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 review, STB
- 9 should examine ways to mitigate adverse impacts to
- 10 historic properties. While reading is one of my
- great pleasures, I don't consider the documentation
- of a historic site makes up in any way for the
- 13 historic site itself.
- 15 with no historic protection. That would burden the
- 16 City with defending its historic resources on its own
- 17 after dealing with decades of problems the railroads
- left it with. Plus, it's your jurisdiction, will
- 19 encourage the demolition and destruction of
- invaluable historic infrastructure.
- That infrastructure is now a critical
- resource in the context of global warming, that is

- this particular one, in reference to the catastrophic
- flooding that can, and already has occurred in
- downtown Jersey City, but it indisputably mitigated
- 4 by the 6th Street embankment structure in its current
- 5 natural state. I ask the STB to use its own power in
- 6 Section 106 to explore true mitigation of adverse
- ⁷ effects. Thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks very much, Claire.
- 9 Appreciate it. Our next speaker is Barkha Patel.
- MS. PATEL: Hello. Can you hear me?
- MR. TABACHNICK: Oh. Sure can.
- MS. PATEL: Okay. Good evening. I'm
- 13 Barkha Patel, Director of the Department of
- 14 Infrastructure for the City of Jersey City. My
- department is responsible for the planning, design
- and implementation of the City's critical, public
- infrastructure, including streets, transit, parks,
- public spaces, municipal buildings, and other public
- 19 facilities.
- The Harsimus Branch embankment contributes
- 21 substantial historical significance, and a unique
- 22 sense of place to the fabric of Jersey City. I

Page 17 cannot emphasize enough how deeply concerned we are 2 about the risk of losing this historic structure if 3 the STB abandons the Harsimus Branch at this juncture, without strong requirements for its 5 preservation and public use in line with our 6 redevelopment plan and many city master plans. 7 Our resiliency master plan locates the 8 embankment in a priority area within a watershed 9 district, which includes four downtown historic 10 districts that will suffer a tremendous loss if the 11 Harsimus Branch and its embankment are removed from 12 federal jurisdiction. 13 Among the goals of this plan are to create 14 a Jersey City that is resilient against flooding, and 15 to create a socially resilient community using 16 tactics like preserving historic neighborhoods and 17 structures. The embankment deserves to be protected 18 as a historic structure, and has a vital role to play 19 in providing protection from the impacts of climate 20 change on its surrounding community.

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Local laws are not enough to

protect it from adverse effects. Our adaptation

- 1 master plan goes further to recommend creating
- embankments, and raising land in some areas of this
- district, which would serve to protect from both
- 4 rainfall, flooding and storm surge.
- 5 Our bicycle master plan in alignment with
- 6 our climate action plan, calls for investment in
- ⁷ alternatives to single occupancy vehicles, and for
- 8 reduction in vehicle miles traveled. The plan
- 9 includes a Harsimus Branch embankment as a key active
- 10 mobility corridor that will provide a safe and
- 11 attraction option for walking and biking for people
- of all ages and abilities.
- Finally, our greenway connectivity plan
- identifies the Harsimus Branch embankment as a high
- 15 priority connection that would advance the east coast
- greenway, a greenway with a planned route that spans
- 17 the entire coast from Maine to Florida.
- The main coalition of the
- 19 Jersey City Division of Planning, with input from my
- department, recently worked with a developer of
- Hudson Exchange Property on this gap, to include a
- 22 landing for pedestrian and biking bridges across

- 1 Marin Boulevard that would join the embankment with a
- 2 public plaza at the Hudson Exchange location.
- My department has the expertise to consult
- 4 on ways to avoid, minimize and mitigate adverse
- 5 effects that would stem from the release of the
- 6 Harsimus Branch from federal jurisdiction. I ask the
- 7 STB to include us in a robust process to do so.
- 8 Jersey City, and all of our partners have put
- 9 considerable energy into our redevelopment plan that
- 10 still allows for private development, with minimal
- impact to this historic embankment.
- We have a rare opportunity to protect a
- significant piece of Jersey City's history, and we
- 14 need the STB to take a strong stance in support of
- 15 its protection. We appreciate this Board giving it
- the attention and consideration that this project
- deserves. Thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks very much. Next
- 19 we have Deirdre Newman? And a note for Matt, can you
- 20 make sure the clock is lit for everybody? I guess I
- 21 could text you to do that, but that would just be
- 22 easier now.

Page 20 1 MR. CROSS: The clock is visible to 2 everybody. 3 MR. TABACHNICK: Okay. Thanks. MR. CROSS: I don't have a Deirdre on my 5 list. The next one is Stephen, who is on screen 6 right now. 7 MR. TABACHNICK: Okay. Let's go with 8 Stephen Gucciardo. Stephen? MR. CROSS: Stephen, we need you to unmute 10 please. 11 MR. GUCCIARDO: Thank you for this 12 opportunity to speak. My name is Stephen Gucciardo. 13 I'm the President the Embankment Preservation 14 Coalition. I have spent the last 25 years together 15 with many of you, protecting one of our most precious 16 resources. 17 With the knowledge that the 6th Street 18 embankment was a state and municipal historic 19 landmark, and that the City of Jersey City wanted to 20 purchase portions of the Harsimus Branch for public 21 uses consistent with historic preservation, Conrail 22 unlawfully sold the embankment parcels to a private

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 m l}$ entity, circumventing the City's and the public's
- 2 rights.
- Rail lines must formally apply to the STB
- 4 for abandonment before a rail line can be sold, not
- 5 after. That's when the process requires an
- 6 environmental and historic preservation review, and
- ⁷ affords the municipality a window of opportunity to
- 8 acquire the railroad property. That opportunity was
- ⁹ taken from us.
- 10 Conrail only applied for abandonment after
- they were forced to comply as the courts ruled that
- 12 STB still had jurisdiction. To date, STB has not
- used its extensive powers to prevent or reverse the
- unlawful sale. Instead, STB claims its jurisdiction
- 15 is limited because the property was sold, and no
- 16 longer belongs to Conrail.
- So, the sale is unlawful, but you can't do
- anything because the sale occurred? Is this the
- mission of the STB to tie its own hands? To cancel
- 20 its own authority? Why should rail owners comply
- with regulations if there are no consequences? With
- 22 these self-imposed restrictions, STB is poised to

- 1 authorize abandonment with no historic preservation
- ² protections.
- Meaningless signs, and commemorative
- 4 website are not historic preservation. How will
- 5 Conrail place the proposed signage on property they
- 6 no longer own? And what consolation reading a
- quelogy about the Harsimus Branch on a website be,
- 8 when the transportation corridor is disassembled and
- 9 destroyed? To STB I say if you won't reinstate our
- 10 rights by reversing the sale, and you can't impose
- meaningful conditions on abandonment, then deny the
- 12 abandonment application.
- No action does more to protect the
- 14 Harsimus Branch than this MOA. In other words, if
- you can't do anything good, don't do anything at all.
- Don't reward Conrail, and don't leave us at mercy of
- 17 a particular purchaser that gains control through an
- unlawful sale.
- 19 To the New Jersey State Historic
- 20 Preservation Office, I say please, don't sign off on
- this proposed MOA. Signing undermines your agency's
- 22 landmark designation of the 6th Street embankment.

- 1 Signing validates a fatally flawed 106 process that
- 2 has ignored the facts and foreclosed on any
- meaningful comment or protection. This MOA
- 4 disrespects our state's efforts to preserve and
- 5 protect its historic resources.
- 6 To the LLC's and developers who say they
- 7 are working with us in good faith to settle
- 8 litigation, I say sign the settlement now before more
- 9 litigation ensues, so we can all begin the process
- 10 of realizing the incredible potential of the Harsimus
- 11 Branch, and create a worldclass project we can all
- benefit from, and be proud of.
- I want to thank the public, City agencies,
- 14 neighborhood and regional groups, and government
- 15 representatives for attending this meeting, and
- taking the time to let STB know what you want them to
- do and not do. Thank you very much.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you, Stephen. Our
- 19 next speaker is Tom Monahan, and please try to stay
- within the three minute limit, so we can get everyone
- in to speak. Tom?
- MR. MONAHAN: Good evening. I assume you

Page 24 can hear me. Thank you Alan for taking the time. МУ 2 name is Tom Monahan. I live here in Jersey City a 3 few blocks away from the embankment. I'm also the President of the Harsimus Cove Association, the 5 Harsimus Branch embankment delineates the northern 6 border of our historic neighborhood association. 7 I think that we're here faced with the 8 question of whether Conrail and the LLCs that unlawfully acquired the embankment are going to be 10 rewarded for that unlawful conduct. In addition to 11 being a resident here in Jersey City, I'm also a 12 practicing attorney, and quite frankly I find the 13 idea that signage and a website, and the minimal 14 preservation obligations in the current memorandum of 15 understanding, is the consequence of flagrantly 16 violating the law. 17 I find it galling, and quite frankly 18 astonishing. Clearly, the Surface Transportation Board has the ability, and quite frankly, the 19 20 obligation to find that Conrail cannot abandon this 21 property unless it makes arrangements, and agreements

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to ensure that this important public corridor and

- green space is preserved, and that every brick of
- ² historic Harsimus embankment is maintained.
- You know, Alan, I think you said it at the
- beginning that the STB can approve the abandonment
- 5 with conditions, and I quite frankly don't understand
- 6 how those conditions won't include maintaining and
- 7 preserving this important historic resource in our
- 8 neighborhood. You know, the LLCs stand at the
- 9 precipice of obtaining a windfall, quite frankly, by
- 10 redeveloping a portion of this embankment to build,
- 11 by redeveloping it.
- I think that's astonishing in and of
- itself, but to allow anything to move forward without
- specific agreements and obligations to preserve the
- 15 embankments, and imposing the authority of the
- 16 federal government, which very clearly has
- 17 jurisdiction over this piece of property would be a
- gross dereliction of this transportation board's
- 19 duty.
- So I would call on the STB to only sign
- off on the abandonment if the embankment is
- 22 preserved, and every brick of the embankment is

- devoted to the public, and the open space, and open
- trails corridor that it very richly should become.
- 3 Thank you very much.
- 4 MR. TABACHNICK: All right. Thanks Tom.
- 5 Next we have I don't know if it's John or Nancy
- 6 Perls.
- 7 MR. PERLS: John, and Nancy, but I will
- 8 speak. Looking for your clock, there we go. Okay.
- 9 Thanks for giving us the opportunity to state how we
- 10 feel. It's not a huge amount that I can add to what
- everybody has been speaking about. It's obviously a
- concern to our community as a whole, especially those
- 13 folks that live near or adjacent to the embankment.
- 14 And our house happens to be butting up to
- 15 the embankment. We are in a flood zone. The impact
- of storms like Sandy, we felt greatly, and I would
- 17 hate to imagine how we would feel if that embankment
- is demolished. We are just, I think it's really
- overall saddened ever since we lived in Jersey City.
- We have been hearing about this going back and forth
- and back and forth, and if I tell you that people in
- 22 the city as a whole are upset about this, it would be

- 1 an understatement.
- You know, it marks you know, parts of
- Jersey City as someone mentioned earlier from
- 4 Harsimus Cove to Hamilton Park. In fact, you know,
- 5 when you are on the turnpike, and you know that
- 6 you're almost home is when you can see the strip of
- ⁷ the embankment. You also can see as you're flying in
- 8 into Newark Airport.
- It's just a part of, you know, our
- 10 neighborhood. It's part of how a lot of people --
- it's funny, there's a lot of historic about the
- 12 neighborhood itself. You know our homes are -- a lot
- of our homes are from the 1860's and this is just
- part of that fabric, but again, what other folks have
- been talking about is, you know, really holding, you
- know, some responsibility, and hopefully that the STB
- 17 halts or reverses the Conrail sale, and again the
- impact of the community is I think, you know, the
- most important thing about who you're impacting, you
- 20 know, people that live here.,
- And I think that, you know, that why this
- 22 should be you know, turned into, you know, housing

- 1 and apartment buildings, and things for people who
- aren't even here yet, is just besides I think all of
- 3 us. Anyway, I appreciate the time for letting us
- 4 express how we feel. Thanks.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks very much guys. I
- 6 appreciate you're being here and taking the time.
- 7 Next up is Maureen Crowley. Maureen?
- MS. CROWLEY. Good evening. I'm Maureen
- 9 Crowley, Founder of the Embankment Coalition. I'd
- 10 like to give context to the situation that we're in.
- 11 Twenty years ago coalition reps met with Conrail reps
- 12 to discuss embankment acquisition. Conrail asked for
- 13 letters from City government officials expressing
- interest, and we never heard back.
- We then raised funds for Jersey City to
- meet Conrail's price. A city attorney asked Conrail
- 17 for abandonment status, and tried to inspect the
- site. Conrail postponed inspection, and then sold
- 19 the property to eight LLCs. This sale shocked us
- 20 because by that time the ordinary citizens knew that
- the Harsimus could not be sold without this agency's
- 22 advanced permission.

- How did we know? We called the STB, which
- 2 had no record of the line's abandonment. A
- professional researcher confirmed our findings. Can
- 4 Conrail, with its rail regulatory experience and
- ownership records seriously contend it didn't know?
- ⁶ We then formally petitioned the STB, which agreed the
- 7 rail line was a regulated rail line, but did Conrail
- 8 concede and return whatever payment it had received
- 9 from the LLCs? No. Appeals winded their way through
- 10 the courts until Conrail finally stipulated that the
- Harsimus Branch was a regulated rail line.
- 12 At this point did Conrail and the LLCs
- 13 correct the situation by returning deeds and
- 14 payments? No. Did STB require them to? No. And
- 15 now, is STB holding a Section 106 review that has
- 16 considered with consulting parties ways to "avoid,
- minimize or mitigate adverse effects to historic
- 18 resources,"? No. We don't believe so.
- Do these ways exist? We say yes they do.
- Jersey City's Council has passed a redevelopment plan
- that would preserve seven of the eight blocks.
- 22 Another one is waiting for a developer to make last

- 1 minute changes we hope, and these are important for
- 2 settlement.
- Please OEA, facilitate the settlement by
- 4 reviewing these plans as part of this process, not
- 5 undermine it by signaling that the agency proposes to
- 6 cease historic protections. Finally, I quote STB's
- own policy on railroads that have sold rail property
- 8 without first seeking abandonment authority.
- 9 "We generally do not discover these
- 10 actions until after the fact. Such actions are
- 11 unlawful. The Board's ability to carry out its
- obligations under NEPA and HPA may be adversely
- 13 affected. The Board will continue to carry out its
- obligations under those statutes, and will take
- 15 whatever steps necessary to enforce compliance with
- 16 them."
- 17 Please, OEA, consider the steps necessary
- to comply with your own policy, and with the letter
- 19 and spirit of the National Historic Preservation Act.
- 20 Correct the course you are on. Do not reward Conrail
- for its unlawful sale, and give other companies
- 22 strong incentives to sell or destroy historic

- resources before applying for permission to abandon
- 2 their lines.
- We also ask our State Historic
- 4 Preservation Office, which did a very good job with
- 5 helping to identify historic resources along the
- 6 branch, to not sign any MOA that offers no real
- 7 mitigation measures. Thank you very much for your
- 8 time.
- 9 MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Maureen. Next up
- 10 is Peter Delman, Peter? Okay. Peter isn't here.
- 11 How about Jessica Costantine?
- MS. COSTANTINE: Can you hear me?
- MR. TABACHNICK: Sure. Hi, how are you
- 14 doing?
- MS. COSTANTINE: Hi. I'm Jessica
- 16 Costantine, and I'm a Board member of the Embankment
- 17 Preservation Coalition, and I'd like to say that it's
- 18 about meaningful historic preservation remedies.
- 19 The STB's decision will expose the Sixth street embankment
- 20 and the Harsimus Cove Branch to demolition.
- I urge the STB to add historical
- 22 preservation remedies into the MOA, so that the

- 1 structure is not vulnerable to developers who would
- wish to demolish it. The current suggestions in the
- 3 MOA are not sufficient. They are documenting a
- 4 destructive policy that will forever change the
- 5 landscape of Jersey City.
- 6 And I would also like to comment as a
- ⁷ Jersey City resident of over 15 years who lives on
- 8 6th Street. And I'm also an educator who has taught
- 9 in Jersey City. I'd like to share how the
- 10 embankment has impacted my practice as a teacher, and
- my students. I don't think you guys can see me, but
- 12 I have a picture here that I can email, some of my
- 13 students studying the embankment.
- Elementary students, who are able to go to
- 15 the embankment, and feel and touch the structure, and
- think about the rails going above the street line,
- and thinking about how commerce was transported above
- the downtown streets of Jersey City. They observed
- 19 the remnants of the train line from the time past to
- envision what it was like for the people who lived in
- 21 Jersey City many years past.
- In addition, they can also see what the

- 1 rail line looks like today, how the past as melded
- with the future, and how it's become a beautiful
- 3 sanctuary for wildlife and vegetation, and for above
- 4 the street level. And it's also a great spark of
- 5 their imagination to think of the revitalization of
- 6 American landscape, and how they could possibly make
- 7 their mark on imagining what could be up there, what
- 8 the city could make, such a beautiful, open
- 9 landscape from day to day.
- 10 So I would hope that STB will consider
- adding some more historic preservation language to
- 12 this MOA, so that we can preserve this landmark of
- 13 Jersey City. Thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Jessica. Let's go
- back to Peter Delman. I thought I saw you login to
- the meeting. Peter, are you there to provide
- 17 comments?
- MR. DELMAN: Can you hear me now?
- MR. TABACHNICK: Hi. Thanks for joining.
- MR. DELMAN: Okay. Thank you. I'm Peter
- Delman, Founder and current Board member of the
- 22 Embankment Coalition. I'd like to speak on the

- subject of public engagement by the STB. A decision
- 2 by the STB Board to remove the Branch from its
- jurisdiction without imposing historic preservation
- 4 conditions will be damaging to the public interest,
- 5 yet the public has not been meaningfully engaged in a
- 6 process that's supposed to have engaged them early
- 7 on.
- In our experience, STB largely rejects
- 9 public comment. For example, in the environmental
- 10 review phase of the case, when hundreds of commenters
- 11 requested that the agency do an environmental impact
- 12 statement, rather than a narrowly focused
- environmental assessment, the STB went ahead with
- what it typically does, a light evaluation.
- In this section 106 review process, we
- understand the agency is supposed to engage the
- 17 public early. STB did not do this, but instead
- 18 conflated public interest consulting parties with
- 19 the public. Only at the urging of consulting parties
- 20 is this virtual public meeting being held.
- Such a meeting should be held in person
- 22 near the site. Virtual meetings are fine for

Page 35 technically adept people, but exclude others. 2 meeting has the feel of a check off the box event. 3 We also request that you notify by mail property 4 owners to the north and south of the Harsimus Branch. 5 As reported to us, the results seemed to 6 have been hit or miss. It has fallen largely to 7 nonprofit organizations to get out the word on this 8 meeting. Details of the meeting were not available until two weeks beforehand. Local organizations need 10 a longer lead time to inform members. There is a 11 large, Spanish speaking population and a housing 12 complex at Marin Boulevard, adjacent to the 13 embankment, and two senior centers on 6th Street. 14 Staff at POPCO, the housing complex, were 15 unaware of this meeting, or the process. They 16 requested information in Spanish. Unfortunately, we 17 did not have the time to supply it for them. 18 crunches imposed by STB in the past have hampered 19 nonprofit consulting parties' ability to meaningfully 20 engage in other ways. 21 Most organizations meet once a month, are 22 all volunteers, and have difficulty meeting 30 day

- deadlines for substantive comment on complex
- documents. While a 30 day comment period may seem
- 3 reasonable to paid employees of government, this time
- 4 period is problematic for many people.
- 5 A decision to permit abandonment without
- 6 historic preservation conditions would have great
- implications for the people of Jersey City, directly
- 8 to those in the historic district, especially to
- 9 property owners, along the Branch and embankment.
- 10 This property could be damaged by adjacent
- demolition.,
- 12 There is also measured impact in
- 13 foreclosing opportunities to address important public
- meetings. For sustainable transportation, climate
- 15 change amelioration, storm water and flood plain
- 16 control, and forested open space, all while
- 17 preserving historic resources. Thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Peter. Glad you
- 19 could make it. Appreciate it. Let's move on to
- 20 James Solomon. Hi James.
- MR. SOLOMON: Hi. Can you hear me?
- MR. TABACHNICK: Sure can.

Page 37 MR. SOLOMON: Wonderful. Thank you for 2 having me. My name is James Solomon. I'm a City 3 Council representative for downtown Jersey City. 4 Appreciate the opportunity to speak. And I say I 5 think without hyperbole that the preservation of the 6 Harsimus Branch embankment is the most unifying issue 7 among the citizens that I represent. I'm asked about it frequently from folks from all walks of life, new residents, and those who 10 are born and raised in downtown Jersey City. And 11 what they hope for is that the historic branch will 12 be preserved, that there will be public access, that 13 the environmental benefits of the sort of urban force 14 that has grown there remain. 15 And that's why they are concerned, and why 16 you will see so many of my constituents on this call 17 today about this Section 106 hearing. We want to 18 ensure that Conrail is not rewarded for improper 19 abandonment of the rail line, and that there will be 20 conditions laid out in the MOU, MOA, excuse me, do 21 not ultimately meet the type of historic preservation 22 and public paths that the community here needs, the

- 1 community here wants, and the community here has
- 2 spent 25 years fighting for.
- To give you just the quick example.
- 4 Jessica spoke about her students. I walk by the
- 5 embankment everyday with my family on the way to
- 6 school. And it's existence has prompted numerous
- 7 conversations with my daughters whenever they ask,
- 9 you know, what is this?
- 9 And we talk about there was a rail line.
- 10 I tell her why there was a rail line there. Why
- there aren't trains on it anymore. The property
- owners nearby have been severely, negatively
- impacted, which the rail line has abandoned without
- 14 any proper historic protections.
- So I ask the STB to use all the powers at
- its disposal to avoid, minimize, or mitigate any
- 17 adverse effects on the historic Harsimus Embankment
- 18 Branch as required by federal law, not contribute to
- 19 its destruction, or simply overrun the voice of the
- downtown Jersey City and Jersey City as a whole, who
- 21 speak and ask you to ensure the historic nature is
- 22 preserved. Thank you so much.

Page 39 MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks James. Appreciate 2 it. Next up is Greg Remaud, from the New York New 3 Jersey Bay Keeper. Greg? 4 MR. REMAUD: Hi. Can you hear me? 5 MR. TABACHNICK: Sure can. 6 MR. REMAUD: Okay. I'm not sure if the 7 video is up, but thank you very much for the 8 opportunity to comment today. I'm going to try to say a few things. Fortunately, we have so many good 10 speakers, and so many concerned folks about this 11 project. I'm going to try to kick out a few things 12 that might not be said. 13 One thing is I think just its really critical to understand that this is not the simple 15 rail transfer issue. It's certainly not a run of the 16 mill. It's a significant project. You know, what 17 I'm getting at is it's transformational for the 18 region. It's transformational for Jersey City. You 19 can't replace or build something like this. 20 It's an opportunity just by preserving 21 what's there to provide public access, which connects 22 up not just Jersey City, but up through Essex,

- 1 Huntington County and Essex County. It's one, it's a
- terrific opportunity to store storm water in the
- ³ embankment, which also reduces nearby flooding in a
- very densely populated, and intensely developed area.
- 5 There's the green space that Peter alluded to.
- 6 You know, there's high asthma rates in the
- 7 region, the air quality is not great in our congested
- 8 areas. Hudson County, along with the five New York
- 9 City counties are the most densely populated counties
- in the country, so this region is the most densely
- 11 populated region in the country.
- So all these benefits, which you can't
- 13 simply replace or find elsewhere, are available in
- this project, and this project -- we're simply asking
- 15 folks to follow the letter of the law to avoid the
- impact on this historic structure, and I appreciate
- the opportunity to speak, but we've had to speak
- many, many times, and do not feel certainly that STB
- 19 has heard us.
- 20 And that the significance of this project
- 21 for Jersey City and for the region that's
- 22 transformative, is not being given the full

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 m l}$ consideration, or at least not to this date. And we
- 2 hope it's considered more moving forward. I'll stop
- there. Thank you very much for the opportunity to
- 4 register these comments.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Greg. Appreciate
- 6 it. Thanks for taking the time. Austin Sakong?
- 7 MR. SAKONG: Hi everybody. My name is
- 8 Austin Sakong. I've lived in Jersey City since 2005.
- 9 I'm a Commissioner on the Jersey City Historic
- 10 Preservation Commission. I'm a Board member of the
- 11 Embankment Preservation Coalition. I'm an actively
- 12 practicing architect. I'm also an educator who
- 13 teaches urban design at Columbia and NYU.
- 14 And I want to begin by acknowledging the
- 15 awe inspiring work and vision of the many members of
- the Jersey City community represented here today.
- 17 Community members who have been at this for decades
- now, through every imaginable, procedural, legal and
- 19 political hurdle.
- You know, nowadays, I think everyone talks
- about green infrastructure, and it's easy to see why,
- 22 right? You turn on the news and there's always some

- story about some city struggling with heatwaves,
- about flooding, you know, massive species die offs,
- but the community members that you're hearing from
- 4 today had the foresight, long before any of these
- 5 issues were daily headlines, to transform this
- 6 remnant of 20th Century infrastructure into a new
- 7 21st Century piece of green infrastructure.
- 8 And this was a vision I think to connect
- 9 history to future, to an infrastructure that absorbs
- 10 carbon, cleans the air, promotes ecological
- diversity, captures storm water and mitigates urban
- 12 heat effect, all the while making plain the
- opportunity for open public space.
- And it's a vision that is as astonishing
- 15 for being so ahead of its curve, and it is deeply
- 16 pragmatic because after all, these are all functions
- 17 that the embankment already performs today. And
- importantly, it's a vision that the City of Jersey
- 19 City has recognized, and incorporated into its
- 20 redevelopment plan.
- The Harsimus Branch and the 6th Street
- 22 embankment are now recognized in the City's master

- 1 plans, and further, development projects around the
- embankment have already been designed, and the
- 3 construction is underway today to incorporate the
- 4 continuous ecological corridor that the Harsimus
- 5 Branch provides.
- And I think it's important that the STB
- 7 recognize this work that has gone into all these
- 8 plans, and at the very least, include them in the
- 9 MOA. As a practicing architect, I just want to say
- imagine the cost of designing and building, and
- 11 paying for something that does all the things that
- 12 the embankment is already doing now.
- 13 Imagine how audacious and innovative it
- would be to propose a brand new mile long eight acre
- 15 forest through a dense downtown anywhere else in the
- 16 country. But in fact, this is what the embankment
- 17 already is, and that we, as a society, would
- 18 consider abandoning it with no substantive
- 19 conditions, that we would entertain discarding such
- 20 an asset in favor of interpretative signs and a
- website I think speaks not only to our collective
- inability to protect the heritage of our past, but

- also our inability to protect the viability of our
- 2 future.
- 3 So I ask the STB to follow this
- 4 community's lead, to honor this vision that they've
- been fighting for for decades, and which has now
- 6 become an integral part of Jersey City's planning.
- 7 And I think this means that the STB should
- 8 exercise their authority fully within their
- ⁹ jurisdiction to reinstate our community's rights, to
- 10 fully protect the historic embankment, to reject this
- MOA in its current form, to acknowledge that the way
- 12 that Section 106 process has been conducted has been
- 13 fundamentally flawed, to prevent establishing a
- tremendously damaging precedent, and to restore the
- possibility of a better future in Jersey City.
- 16 Thank you for this time.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Austin.
- 18 Appreciate it. Next up is Sean Gallagher.
- MR. GALLAGHER: Thank you, Alan. So my
- 20 name is Sean Gallagher. I'm a Jersey City resident
- who watched my father with global advocates transform
- 22 the abandoned Central Railroad in New Jersey Rail

- 1 Yard into a green state park, the most visited state
- 2 park in the nation.
- Jersey City, almost 50 years ago saw that
- 4 historic infrastructure, rail infrastructure, could
- 5 be reimagined as national and recreational green
- 6 space for the public good, making the city more
- ⁷ livable and more sustainable. Today, I'm dedicated
- 8 to continuing that effort, as a sustainable design
- ⁹ director at Diller Scofidio and Renfro.
- We reimagine New York City's 10th Avenue
- 11 Line as what everyone understands today as a High
- 12 Line, an innovative green infrastructure that
- 13 connects the community of Manhattan together in a
- 14 whole new way, and is being replicated all around the
- 15 world.
- 16 However, I believe that the Harsimus
- 17 Branch and the embankment has the potential to be
- more impactful locally, more impactful nationally
- 19 than even a High Line could ever be. As a Board
- 20 member of the Preservation Coalition, I request that
- 21 STB reconsider the abandonment with no conditions,
- 22 and help the city and the coalition protect this

- right-of-way as a public asset.
- Our historic rails, their right-of-ways
- 3 are vital in our fight against climate change, and to
- 4 make cities healthier places. And these
- 5 right-of-ways are disassembled, and not repurposed as
- 6 green infrastructure. We are losing one of the
- 7 greatest tools we have in our tool box for creating
- 8 large scale green infrastructure within existing
- ⁹ urban fabrics.
- Jersey City, like most cities, and
- 11 specifically coastal cities, will continue to suffer
- 12 from increased levels of extreme heat, pollution,
- 13 flooding and the Harsimus Branch in this
- 14 right-of-way, already acts as green infrastructure,
- 15 as Austin said, to mitigate these risks, and make our
- 16 city more livable.
- Today, on top of the embankment is the
- largest, I believe nationally seated downtown urban
- 19 forest in the United States. It's 30 years old.
- 20 It's a mature eco-system at the center, at the heart
- of Jersey City. It's forest is currently estimated
- 22 to be lowering the heat by about 5 degrees around the

- 1 neighbors. It's also absorbing about 8.6 million
- 2 gallons of storm water.
- And it's sequestering 120 tons of carbon
- dioxide pollution, while providing 88 tons of fresh
- 5 oxygen to our residents. But the vision for the
- 6 embankment, it's much more than this. The vision
- 7 reimagines this embankment as a continuous corridor
- 8 that will connect the east coast greenway, and 400
- 9 communities from Florida to Maine, all along the
- 10 Atlantic coast.
- 11 The east coast greenway has coordinated
- with the embankment and the Bergen Arches for this
- 13 nationally significant trail from north to south,
- that is built on the idea of right-of-ways for the
- 15 public good. Jersey City and the Embankment
- 16 Preservation Coalition have been protecting this
- 17 railroad right-of-way as green infrastructure for
- 18 public space for over 25 years.
- 19 And with the help of STB. However, if
- this is abandoned with no conditions, the embankment
- 21 right-of-way then becomes more likely to be
- disassembled, broken up, and developed for private

- 1 profits. Our city residents will lose 8 acres of
- public green space they currently have. The
- 3 opportunity for Jersey City to have an east coast
- 4 greenway trail and park system to fight climate
- 5 change and to strengthen community, is not
- 6 replaceable.
- I ask you to continue to help protect the
- 8 integrity of this rail right-of-way, and be a leader
- 9 in demonstrating how the opportunity we have to use
- obsolete, historic railways for green infrastructure
- in the future. The current MOA does not accomplish
- 12 this. I really ask that STB not present this to the
- 13 Board or SHPO and not move forward until it has
- reconsidered and starts to protect this right of way,
- 15 thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Sean. Next up we
- 17 have Michael Darling, and please keep an eye on the
- 18 clock, or we may run out of time for people to
- 19 provide comments, so appreciate that. Michael?
- MR. DARLING: Sure. Thank you so much,
- and thank you to everyone else who has spoken at this
- 22 point. My name is Michael Darling. I'm a resident

- of Paulus Hook, so a historic district in downtown
- Jersey City, and much like other historic downtown
- districts, we will all suffer if we lose historic
- 4 buildings and sites.
- 5 I'm also a proud Board member of the
- 6 Embankment Preservation Coalition team. And as
- you've heard from others, we're a nonprofit dedicated
- 8 to the protection and the restoration of the historic
- 9 Harsimus Branch embankment, and longer right-of-way,
- 10 as well as its reuse for multiple public purposes.
- This rail line offers the potential for
- 12 green infrastructure that can connect our communities
- in a way that very few other projects could, and our
- goal is simple, and we're steadfast in our belief
- 15 that we must preserve, restore and activate this
- historic rail line.
- So as such, I must wholeheartedly object to
- 18 the Surface Transportation Board's draft memorandum
- of agreement. It falls woefully short in offering
- ways to avoid, minimize or mitigate adverse effects
- to this historic rail line, its embankment, and
- 22 other historic sites along its path.

Page 50 Documentation and signage are not 2 acceptable mitigation. And the STB is not 3 considering its own authority to offer real 4 mitigation solutions. Furthermore, having not held a 5 public comment hearing period up until now this late in the process, I believe that the STB has failed to 6 adequately engage and consider the views of the 8 public. Finally, Conrail should be held 10 responsible for its illegal sale of the Harsimus 11 Branch. The STB has the unique authority to void 12 that unlawful sale, righting the wrong that Jersey 13 City residents, our community has had to endure for over two decades. In conclusion, I implore the STB 15 to consider real mitigation efforts that will support 16 the more than two decades of community activism to 17 protect this historic rail property, not 18 contributing to harming the city's historic 19 resources. Thank you so much. 20 MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Michael, 21 appreciate it. Next up Cynthia Sanford. 22 MS. SANFORD: Hi. Yes, I'm Cynthia

- 1 Sanford. I have been a homeowner in Jersey City
- since 1974, and I've been both personally and
- 3 professionally involved in historic preservation
- 4 here and other places. I agree with everything other
- 5 people have said, so I'm going to shorten my comments
- a bit, and I apologize if I repeat them, because they
- 7 truly are from the heart.
- 8 So I'm asking STB please not to release
- 9 the Harsimus Branch from federal jurisdiction.
- 10 Understand that the draft MOA your office has
- 11 prepared, offers documentation as signage as
- 12 mitigations for adverse effects. Signage, words on
- paper or online, cannot be acceptable as mitigation
- 14 for the potential destruction of a historic corridor,
- 15 and massive stone structure that currently provides
- 16 services to the City, and our plan to provide so much
- more.
- The Harsimus corridor links, as others
- 19 have said, to other corridors making up the East
- 20 Coast Greenway Maine to Florida Trail. It also
- includes an existing major natural forest, a rare
- 22 and precious urban resource for climate resilience

Page 52 1 that provides many benefits, including active and 2 passive recreation, cleaner air, flood control and 3 lower summer temperatures for Jersey City residents. It would be negligent and shameful not to 5 respect the nearly quarter century of work dedicated 6 embankment coalition volunteers to develop a vision for the Harsimus Branch historic embankment structure 8 that respects and preserves its historic character and natural integrity. It's connection with urban 10 neighborhood surroundings, and its potential as a 11 link on the east coast greenway. 12 That vision, expressed in the coalition 13 video and redevelopment plans written by City 14 planners, through the cooperation of both the 15 coalition, and its adversaries in litigation, and 16 reviewed by the public, integrates historic 17 preservation, development, active and passive 18 recreation, and habitat. It has overwhelming public 19 support. 20 It's mind numbing and heartbreaking that 21 this vision and plans for the embankment keep hitting 22 road blocks that are not yet in development. I can't

- 1 say it better than this sentence from the Embankment
- 2 Preservation Coalition website, "Thoughtful treatment
- of the Harsimus Branch can set a precedent for cities
- 4 around the world, demonstrating that healthy ecology
- 5 and infrastructure are compatible, not competitors."
- Realizing the vision for the Harsimus
- 7 Branch would instantly set Jersey City in the
- 8 forefront of the green city movement, please use the
- 9 powers of your agency to protect the public interest
- 10 in this matter. Do not actively contribute to this
- historic resource's vulnerability by removing it from
- 12 federal jurisdiction with no historic preservation
- 13 conditions. Thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you, Cynthia,
- 15 appreciate it. Next up is Ty Bent. Ty, are you
- 16 there?
- MR. CROSS: Ty is not here. Sam is up
- 18 next.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Sam, go right ahead.
- MR. PESIN: Friends of Liberty State Park
- is a 35 year urban open space advocacy group.
- Liberty Park is on the Jersey City Waterfront, and

- 1 next to our shrines of democracy, the Statute of
- 2 Liberty and Ellis Island. And this process must
- 3 respect maximum public participation and the
- 4 overwhelming support for the embankments as a great
- 5 public asset.
- During the pandemic it was shown even more
- 7 clearly how crucial urban parks are for people's
- 8 mental and emotional and physical health. All ages
- 9 came out to enjoy these urban green spaces and
- 10 nature. The Friends, we have a deep interest in the
- 11 historic Harsimus Branch and embankment because the
- visionary potential for an elevated park, and future
- 13 light rail routes are deserved and needed now, and by
- 14 future generations.
- The embankment project will create an
- 16 accessible public use by the reuse of Conrail land is
- 17 common sense, and must become reality, not by your
- destructive wrong actions. Urban people living in
- 19 this crowded, concrete city needs parks and mass
- transit. The proposed embankment project is
- 21 compatible with historic preservation open space,
- 22 hard lane trails and transit corridors, and they're

- 1 facilitating demolition and destruction, would be a
- 2 harmful assault on urban people.
- Urban reuse of former railroad land into
- 4 public lands to serve the public good is enlightened
- 5 public policy, and that's what happened at Liberty
- 6 Park when two railroad companies left the area it
- became the park, and there became waterfront
- 8 infrastructure was cleaned up and transformed into a
- 9 park by the government in saving the land.
- 10 STB must save the embankment for public
- use. Please facilitate the powerful, attainable
- 12 vision, which is on the Embankment Preservation
- 13 Coalition's website, along with the impacted
- identified historic resources. We urge you to
- 15 hold Conrail accountable for their unlawful sale of
- the embankment.
- 17 We must not allow them to be above the
- law, which will set an unconscionable precedent for
- other companies, and Section 106 review. Your
- history and sign proposal is a travesty, and leaves
- the embankment as a prime target for developers
- 22 paving the way for destroying the embankment's public

- use future and green infrastructure future.
- 2 By granting them the memorandum, it's not
- preventing or mitigating adverse effects. I trust
- 4 that you are not incompetent, and you're not
- 5 irresponsible, that you are not hostile to urban
- 6 people, so you're not bureaucrats without a soul, so
- it's a mystery why your horrendous memorandum
- 8 absolves Conrail of its desire for commercial
- 9 development and killing high line type urban greenway
- 10 connecting to other greenways. So please go forward
- with the golden opportunity, and listen to the great
- 12 speakers tonight, and be an agent of positive change.
- 13 Thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: All right thanks.
- 15 Thanks, Sam. William Matsikoudis?
- MR. MATSIKOUDIS: Good evening. Thanks
- for giving me the opportunity to speak as well. I'm
- 18 a proud resident of Jersey City, New Jersey, where I
- 19 was also born. And I have some history with the
- 20 embankment too because in full disclosure I was a
- 21 City attorney for Jersey City, and for nearly 9 years
- dealt with these issues.

Page 57 But I left that post on June 30, 2013, and 2 a decade later the fight continues. I also want to 3 recognize, acknowledge and praise the advocates from the Embankment Preservation Coalition. If you look 5 up what a civic activist is in the dictionary, their 6 picture should be there. 7 For a legal perspective, but even more 8 importantly than the archaic law dealing with railroad abandonment, the public policy perspective, 10 this to me is a no brainer. I know you've heard some 11 hostility, but I just can't imagine that the 12 government would, and the Surface Transportation 13 Board in particular, would allow this resource to be 14 demolished. 15 The requirements of abandonment were not 16 followed. This property is not offered to Jersey 17 City, although I wasn't part of the City at the time, 18 as it was supposed to have been done. And if we 19 allow this to happen today and you've heard many 20 people speak about the benefit to the community. 21 But I look at it from inverse as well, or 22 the converse, which is to say that if this resource

- was taken away, if it was demolished. If this urban
- forest was chopped down, it would be the equivalent
- of an assault, a battery and a violent act against
- 4 the people who live in the community.
- 5 You've heard the benefits of taking storm
- 6 water to avoid floods. You've heard the benefit of
- 7 taking away the heat during the hotter and hotter
- 8 summers, and you heard about, and I think we've heard
- 9 about the oxygen that comes from the many trees
- 10 there.
- If you take those assets away, it would be
- 12 the equivalent of committing a violent act against
- the people of Jersey City, one of the most densely
- 14 populated cities in America. So I have confidence
- 15 you will do the right thing from both the legal
- 16 perspective, and from a public policy perspective
- because the notion that we would let this resource be
- taken away is unconscionable, and something I can't
- 19 imagine that anyone would do in good faith, so thank
- 20 you very much. I hope you do the right thing.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks William, I
- 22 appreciate it. Barbara Seddon, Barbara?

Page 59 MS. SEDDON: Hi. 2 MR. TABACHNICK: Hi. 3 MS. SEDDON: My name is Barbara Seddon. lived for 29 years in a house on the same block as 5 the embankment, and the last 6 years I've lived 6 within two blocks of it. So it's an old friend. And I feel very upset about what is happening. I 8 want to endorse the views expressed so far by so many people, and also by Margaret O'Neill in her letter to 10 the STB on this topic. 11 As she pointed out, and as Steve Gucciardo 12 also said, the STB does have the authority to void 13 the deeds, and unwind the unlawful sale by the no action alternative. The city has long maintained 15 that the granting of an abandonment license, and the 16 loss of federal control of the Harsimus Branch, would 17 have the greatest adverse effect, and would be 18 equivalent to the destruction of the property. 19 It's hard for me to imagine how 20 devastating to our historic neighborhood the 21 destruction of the embankment would be. The last 22 speaker described it as a violent assault, and I'd

- like to offer another metaphor also. Demolishing it
- would be like pulling a thread that would unravel the
- ³ fabric of our neighborhood.
- 4 You have it in your power to prevent this
- 5 heartbreaking result. I beg you to use this power
- 6 wisely. Thank you.
- 7 MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Barbara. Ben
- 8 LaGue?
- 9 MR. LAGUE: Good evening, Ben LaGue, thank
- 10 you, and to the STB OEA for hosting this hearing, and
- giving us a chance to comment. I'm a licensed civil
- engineer and a Hudson County resident since 2007.
- 13 For five of those years I lived on 6th Street, just
- 14 east of Erie Street in Jersey City, directly across
- 15 from a portion of the embankment referred to as Block
- 16 2 in the redevelopment and preservation plans
- 17 prepared by various group such as the Embankment
- 18 Preservation Coalition.
- With regard to the proposed abandonment, I
- would like to endorse and echo the environmental
- comments on record by such groups as the Embankment
- 22 Preservation Coalition, as well as the Jersey City

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 m l}$ Historic Preservation Commission, the National Trust
- ² for Historic Preservation, Rails to Trails
- 3 Conservancy, and the many local, state and federal
- 4 coalitions and associations as well as the numerous
- 5 individuals who feel as strongly as I do that the
- 6 STB's authority and duty are not being met on this
- ⁷ issue.
- 8 STB OEA's responsibilities to take into
- 9 account environmental impacts when making decisions
- 10 is falling short in this case, as the consulting
- 11 parties have not been allowed effective provisions to
- 12 avoid, minimize or mitigate adverse effects of an
- 13 abandonment decision.
- 14 As Alan earlier presented, this charge and
- 15 responsibility is spelled out in the NEPA Section 106
- 16 review process. But the documentation only measures
- outlined in the prepare MOA are inadequate,
- 18 non-mitigation, and inconsistent with truly avoiding
- 19 minimizing or mitigating adverse effects on this
- 20 historic resource.
- 21 As a practicing civil engineer for over 12
- years who works on many local, and large-scale

- ¹ infrastructure projects with a variety of public
- 2 agencies, I know firsthand that these reviews take
- 3 time, money and a great deal of effort. I am no
- 4 stranger to public meetings like this, where many
- 5 voices are expressing desires and perspectives. I
- 6 can relate to what this is like for STB OEA.
- 7 I get it. You have other mandates, other
- 8 projects and changing priorities. I assume the
- 9 current substandard level of response and mitigation
- in this case comes out of a need to balance these
- other priorities. Please rest assured in the
- 12 comments and plans you have, and will receive, that
- the local, state and federal groups, consulting
- parties, and individuals on record, and here
- 15 tonight, are driven to do the heavy lifting for this
- preservation effort.
- But without STB's backing, destruction of
- this historic rail line property is foreseeable.
- 19 Please take stock of your current efforts. Your
- 20 responsibility as an independent agency, and find it
- in your very capable authority to do this job right.
- 22 A decision to abandon this rail line from STB's

- jurisdiction would directly contradict STB OEA's core
- 2 mission. Thank you for your time.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Ben. Russell
- 4 Agle.
- 5 MR. AGLE: Russell Agle.
- 6 MR. TABACHNICK: Agle? Sorry about that.
- 7 MR. AGLE: Thank you for the chance to
- 8 talk tonight. I moved to downtown Jersey City about
- 9 20 years ago, and I was very grateful to have the
- opportunity when I arrived to meet a lot of people
- who themselves and families, had been in Jersey City
- 12 for many decades prior to my arrival.
- 13 A lot of them told me stories about the
- embankment, when it was an active rail line, and how
- they saw all sorts of goods coming and going.
- 16 Heading west from the rail yards on the banks of the
- Hudson, containing everything from steel to cars, to
- 18 livestock.
- 19 These were fascinating stories that really
- drew me into the fabric of Jersey City's industrial
- history and industrial roots. And not just of Jersey
- 22 City, but the entire New York area, and in fact,

Page 64 America's industrial development. 2 I'm not a historic expert, but it's 3 incomprehensible to me how this embankment, as those 4 memories fade, isn't considered a historical 5 artifact, and active historical reminder of what our 6 city has been, and what our country has been. 7 can tell you from just the average person's 8 perspective, no one is aware of the STB. No one is aware of anything that you guys 10 have done to consider whether this is actually a 11 historic landmark or not. Because if you talk to 12 anyone in Jersey City, it is the last remaining 13 remnant of the things and the industrial history that 14 allow us to enjoy the city that we love today. 15 I strongly request that you guys do not 16 proceed with the abandonment, and that you allow this 17 historic landmark to continue in the shape, in the 18 form, that the residents of this community love and 19 cherish so much today. Thank you very much. 20 MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Russell. Sharon 21 Torres? 22 MR. CROSS: Donna Dorgan is here. Do we

Page 65 want to go ahead and go back to her? 2 MR. TABACHNICK: Yeah, let Donna go. When 3 you're ready Donna, thanks. 4 MS. DORGAN: Good evening everybody. 5 name is Donna Dorgan, and I've owned my house on 5th 6 Street between Jersey Avenue and Coal Street in 7 Jersey City since 1998. And my house is part of the 8 Harsimus historic district, and my backyard is the 9 embankment, right. So I'm very familiar with the 10 embankment. 11 And I remember when the trains ran up on 12 the embankment, and I remember when they took down 13 the bridges because of safety, you know, dangerous up 14 there. A lot of people used to hang up there and do 15 all sorts of illegal things, and what have you. 16 So I do remember when the administration 17 arranged to have the bridges between the embankment 18 pieces taken down. Nevertheless, at this point in 19 time what I'm asking the STB to do is if you decide 20 to abandon this embankment, and I hope you don't, 21 but if you do that you impose restrictions on the 22 entire embankment, that it be uniform. All the way,

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 m l}$ which would include Marin Boulevard and Manila
- 2 Boulevard, all the way up to Brunswick Street
- Because my understanding is
- that the developers, the successors to Steven Hyman
- 5 have been working out some sort of arrangement with
- 6 the City to chop off one-sixth of the embankment,
- and build another, you know, skyscraper on top of
- 8 that portion. I believe that the entire embankment
- 9 is historic. I think it's been placed on the state
- 10 register, although I'm not sure.
- And I don't think they should be allowed
- to chop off one piece of this historic structure and
- build a skyscraper. I think I ask that any
- 14 restrictions be placed upon the entire six blocks of
- 15 the embankment.
- And also, I would advocate that the
- embankment be incorporated in the Rails to Trails
- 18 network. It's been a very successful program in many
- 19 places. Also, my understanding is that with the
- 20 Rails to Trail embankment, if at some time there is a
- desire to reactivate the rail line, or maybe install
- 22 some sort of light rail or something else on it, then

Page 67 that could be done, and that's one of the options 2 available with the Rails to Trails dedication of the 3 property. If you allow people to build skyscrapers 5 on top of the embankment, not only is it going to 6 destroy the historic area, but you're going to lose 7 that possibility of using the land as part of a 8 perhaps a light rail network, or to reactive the rail So I would ask that if you decide to abandon line. 10 the embankment, and this rail line, that you impose 11 restrictions on the abandonment to protect the 12 historic nature of the embankment, as well as the 13 adjoining properties in the Harsimus Cove historic 14 district and the Hamilton Park historic district. 15 And that's what I had to say. Thank you 16 for the time and the opportunity to address you. 17 MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you Donna. 18 appreciate it. Sharon Torres are you -- hi Sharon. 19 MS. TORRES: I'm here. Yeah. 20 don't know, I'm not on video, but that's okay. I 21 want to thank you for the opportunity to speak. 22 name is Sharon Torres. The Harsimus Branch in Jersey

- 1 City is a needed link for the east coast greenway
- ² Maine to Florida walking and biking trail from New
- 3 York where I live, through Jersey City.
- 4 I understand that if the Surface
- 5 Transportation Board decides to remove the rail line
- 6 from federal jurisdiction without imposing historic
- 7 protections, it will be directly contributing to the
- 8 site's vulnerability. I suggest -- I'm sorry. I
- 9 know the Embankment Coalition has suggested ways to
- 10 preserve the historic property, and I ask you to
- 11 please consider these in your review process.
- Our historic preservation agencies, both
- 13 federal and state, have an obligation to preserve and
- 14 protect our precious historic resources. I ask the
- 15 STB to avoid, minimize, and mitigate adverse effects
- 16 to the Harsimus Branch as required by law, and a way
- 17 that truly protects the resource.
- To quote Andy Warhol, "I think having land
- 19 and not ruining it, is the most beautiful art that
- anybody could ever want." So, I implore you to not
- ruin whatever you are able to do to please help
- 22 preserve this land and the embankment. Thank you

Page 69 very much. I appreciate the opportunity to speak. 2 MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Sharon. Have a 3 good evening. Frank Gallagher? 4 Thanks for the opportunity DR. GALLAGHER: 5 to talk about the embankment. I'm Dr. Frank 6 Gallagher, with Rutger's State University where I 7 direct environmental planning programming. been involved with the embankment for a couple years now, recently completed an assessment of its 10 ecosystem services, and was quite impressed with 11 actually what the embankment performs for the 12 residents of Jersey City. 13 First, I agree with all the comments that have been made about the historic importance of the 15 remaining fabric of the embankment, and I find its 16 potential to be even greater. The idea that a rail 17 part of the industrial revolution that helped people 18 in that area of the country during the great 19 immigration, but also separated many communities,

- 21 again connect these communities, is a really
- 22 exciting opportunity.

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could be turned into a green corridor that would once

Page 70 In addition to that, the services that the 2 embankment provides today, 7 to 8 acres of green 3 space that sit on top of the embankment are really incredible considering the size and its context. For 5 example, the greenway today mitigates storm water, 6 and contains somewhere around 10 million gallons of storm water within the confines of the embankment at 8 any given time. And that's only considering the rainfall 10 that falls on top of it. The idea of connecting that 11 to the existing system in innovative ways, and 12 decreasing the impact of storm water to a community 13 that gets flooded already is actually outstanding. 14 In addition to that, consider the fact 15 that if you're standing under the 80 percent of the 16 embankment that today has forest cover, you are 17 actually breathing air that has up to 40 percent less 18 particulate matter in it than you would be if you 19 were standing out in the middle of groves, the other 20 canopy street corridors. 21 In addition to that, the embankment 22 provides an opportunity, as many people have already

Page 71 alluded to, to increase the quality of life for 2 people, both physical and psychological quality of life being connected to that type of open space. So, I implore the embankment to honor the vision that has 5 been created by the Embankment Preservation 6 Coalition, and protect this truly unique historic resource. Thank you. MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Frank. Next up is 9 Julianna Dawson. 10 MR. CROSS: Julianna, are you there? 11 MR. TABACHNICK: All right. Let's move on 12 to Chris Perez. 13 MR. CROSS: Chris is not here either. 14 MR. TABACHNICK: Wayne Zimnoch? 15 MR. CROSS: Wayne is also not here. 16 MR. TABACHNICK: John Gomez? 17 MR. CROSS: No. 18 MR. TABACHNICK: How about Arthur Cook? 19 MR. CROSS: Arthur is here. 20 MR. TABACHNICK: Okay. Hi Arthur, Arthur? 21 MR. COOK: Hi. Yes. I'm trying to --22 okay. I'm trying to get my video. Okay. I don't

Page 72 know if you can see me or not, but. 2 MR. CROSS: We can see you. 3 MR. COOK: Okay. Yes. I mean I'm here to ask the Transportation Board to please not compound 5 this unlawful sale of Conrail to this LLC of 6 developers for many reasons. I mean some of the 7 speakers before articulated this much more 8 beautifully. But one of the things that has been going on in Jersey City for a while is that 10 developers really have taken over our city, and it's 11 very difficult for the citizens to be heard in the 12 face of a lot of the damage that they're doing. 13 The environmental damages is of course 14 something that's very profound, as much of our 15 district floods regularly, even with a minor rain 16 event. Just a couple blocks from me cars are 17 underwater if there's even a little bit of rain that 18 hits us. And of course the embankment is a natural 19 aquifer, and again mitigates some of that. But also, I think that the embankment for 20 21 me, as a resident here since 1997, it at this point

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is an old friend, as Barbara has said earlier.

- 1 come across it and it is just something that just is
- there, and speaks to me in a way that you know, the
- 3 soul of the city, much of it in this historic
- 4 district does. And unfortunately, the developers,
- 5 and many of them who are involved in the LLC, want to
- 6 build on the embankment, are the very ones
- 7 responsible for I think killing the soul of the city.
- 8 So, please, I beg you to not let this go
- 9 on. And let us have this embankment for the park and
- 10 for the greenway and the bikeway that I think this
- 11 should be. Thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you. John Delman?
- MR. DELMAN: Can you hear me?
- MR. TABACHNICK: Sure can.
- MR. DELMAN: Oh. Okay. Hi guys. As a
- 16 community historic preservation advocate, and an
- environmentalist, I strongly urge the Surface
- 18 Transportation Board to reconsider its draft
- 19 memorandum of agreement, which would in no way
- ²⁰ mitigate adverse effects to the Harsimus Branch,
- resulting from a Board decision to permit abandonment
- of the rail line.

Page 74 Please don't treat the Section 106 review 2 as a check off box step to an ultimate decision, 3 arming properties listed as eligible for the national register. Instead, continue the review process until 5 you have meaningful mitigation. My understanding is 6 that the City has plans that provide such mitigation, 7 and these should be reviewed as part of the Section 8 106 process. It's your obligation to conduct your 10 review that seeks ways to avoid, minimize, or 11 mitigate adverse effects, not to assume these will 12 happen, and ask Conrail to erect some signage marking 13 the site. In an era of rapidly accelerating climate 14 change, it's more crucial than ever that green spaces 15 be preserved for the public's use and benefit. 16 To demolish the massive embankment 17 structure with this mature forest would be tragic for 18 the environment. It's incumbent on all of us, 19 environmentalists, consumers, concerned citizens, and 20 yes, even those who will be building our future 21 literally, to join a covenant to protect, create, and 22 enhance the green spaces of our land. Thank you very

- 1 much.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you John.
- 3 Christina Donnelly?
- 4 MS. DONNELLY: Thank you for letting me
- 5 have the time to speak. My name is Christina
- 6 Donnelly, and I have lived in Jersey City for more
- 7 than 20 years. Much of this time I have been
- 8 involved with the preservation of this important
- 9 piece of Jersey City's history, through being on the
- 10 Embankment Preservation Coalition Board.
- 11 The Harsimus Branch was a major component
- of downtown Jersey City's once predominant railroad
- 13 landscape. It was part of the largest transportation
- system in the country, and exemplifies elevated
- 15 freight ways. The building of the massive stone
- 16 structure was supervised by James J. Ferris, a
- major figure in civil engineering in the political
- history of Jersey City.
- 19 There are few other structures so
- 20 illustrative of Jersey City's railroad past. The
- embankment deserves to continue standing, not only
- 22 because it is an important site with so much

- history, but it is also has not outlived its
- ² usefulness. It serves the community with the forest
- that has grown on top, with storm water control, and
- 4 with the longer corridor, which is necessary to
- 5 bring the east coast greenway walking and biking
- 6 trail safely off road through our city.
- 7 The corridor is also necessary for
- 8 possible future light rail service from the Hudson
- 9 River waterfront to journal square, or to the major
- 10 transit hub in Secaucus. As a personal note, my
- 11 property is on the north side of 5th Street, and
- backs up to the embankment wall. If the embankment
- were to be demolished, and redeveloped, it would have
- disastrous effects on my property, and the lives of
- my family, my tenants, and my neighbors.
- 16 Immediate and lasting effects include
- 17 flooding, structural damage caused by the demolition,
- 18 and quality of life in our historic area. Does the
- 19 Surface Transportation Board understand the
- devastation that a decision to permit abandonment of
- the Harsimus Branch without any meaningful, historic
- 22 preservation conditions, could inflict on the people

- who live along the Branch?
- Our historic preservation agencies, both
- federal and state, have an obligation to preserve and
- 4 protect our precious, historic resources. This means
- 5 more than just an interpretative plaque on a wall
- 6 somewhere. We ask the STB to consider ways to
- avoid, minimize and mitigate adverse effects to the
- 8 Harsimus Branch as required by law, and in a way that
- 9 truly protects the valuable resource. I thank you
- 10 for the time.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Christine,
- 12 appreciate it. Is Ellen Glynn here? Irene Barnaby?
- MS. BARNABY: Yep. I'm here. My name is
- 14 Irene Barnaby, and I've lived in Jersey City for 18
- 15 years. I currently reside on 5th Street, and the
- back of my house actually looks over the embankment.
- 17 As Alan mentioned, once the agency ends its
- 18 jurisdiction, you will have no control over what
- 19 happens with the embankment.
- 20 But what we do control is whether to
- abandon and to enforce protection parameters, which
- 22 are not in place at this time. If the abandonment

- does occur, we're going to be left with being more
- vulnerable to future developments that could lead to
- the demolition of this neighborhood treasure.
- 4 If you look out my windows you will see
- 5 hawks and beautiful birds, and butterflies. I mean
- 6 it's a really magical place, and we need this
- structure to help mitigate the flooding, provide
- 8 respite for wildlife, provide oxygen and greenery for
- 9 the whole neighborhood.
- 10 Please reconsider this move, and don't
- abandon us. Thank you.
- 12 MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Irene. Joanne
- 13 Gucciardo? Is Joanne here?
- MS. GUCCIARDO: I'm here.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Oh. Go right ahead.
- MS. GUCCIARDO: My name is Joanne
- 17 Gucciardo. I'm a 35 year resident of Jersey City.
- 18 And I agree with the Embankment Preservation
- 19 Coalition's assessment of the MOA being proposed. It
- does nothing to protect the historic resource. It
- should not be signed by any of the concurring
- 22 parties. The federal, state and city agencies

Page 79 involved in this undertaking have very clear mission 2 statements that require them to serve the public's 3 interests. 4 What good is holding meetings for the 5 public and for the consulting parties if you will not 6 reflect their recommendations in your conclusions? Please carry out what your jurisdiction requires by 8 reinstating our rights, holding Conrail accountable, and providing meaningful protection for the 6th 10 Street embankment and the Harsimus Branch. 11 you. 12 MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you. 13 Skolar? 14 MS. SKOLAR: Hi, good evening, how are 15 you? 16 MR. TABACHNICK: Hi.

- MS. SKOLAR: Hi. I am speaking tonight on
- behalf of the Jersey City Parks Coalition. The
- 19 Jersey City Parks Coalition believes that the current
- MOA should be rejected. We understand that Conrail
- sold part of the regulated rail line, and now is
- belatedly applying for abandonment, compromising the

Page 80 quality of the Section 106 review. 2 In terms of the mitigation outlined in the 3 agreement, it is woefully inadequate, and does not 4 represent what the nonprofits involved in open space 5 and preservation in Jersey City can endorse. The 6 Jersey City Parks Coalition is made up of 30 parks, 7 organizations, including parks in the historic 8 districts and neighborhoods through which the Harsimus Branch runs, and that have been identified 10 as being adversely affected, should the Harsimus 11 Branch be authorized for abandonment. 12 We appreciate the fact that after our last 13 meeting you did provide some outreach to other park 14 and neighborhood groups that would also be affected, 15 and have made them part of this consulting party's 16 process. Although the current consulting parties 17 appear to have done a good job of identifying 18 historic resources that will be affected by the 19 abandonment, this phase of the Section 106 process 20 has not received the careful attention it should get 21 It so far has resulted in no measures to 22 avoid or minimize what could be a cascade of adverse

- 1 effects, resulting in the loss of an important and
- generationally valuable Jersey City asset, once lost,
- never to be replaced. The proposed mitigation of
- 4 recordation, documentation, and interpretation is
- 5 totally insufficient and quite frankly a joke.
- 6 Conrail was created by the government, and
- ⁷ it exists with governmental support, but its
- 8 unlawful sale was wrong. They don't appear to be
- 9 trying to make up for it, and the STB does not
- 10 appear to be holding them accountable, at least up
- until now.
- I hope that the comments expressed here
- 13 tonight will drive home the importance, and the
- 14 historic significance of the embankment, and that the
- 15 STB will hold Conrail accountable, and these comments
- will inspire you to do the right thing, and be a
- 17 strong defender of our public good. Thank you very
- much for your time.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Laura. Maggie
- O'Neill. Maggie, you're up.
- MS. O'NEILL: Hey everyone. My name is
- 22 Maggie O'Neill, and I'm the Principal Historic

- 1 Preservation Specialist for the City of Jersey City.
- I am also the Secretary of the Jersey City HPC. The
- 3 HPC finds the draft memorandum of agreement
- 4 circulated by the Surface Transportation Board deeply
- flawed and objectionable in a variety of different
- 6 ways.
- 7 First, the MOA does not mention the
- 8 history of this project, but Conrail unquestionably
- 9 engaged in an unlawful sale of a rail line, and knew,
- 10 or should have reasonably known, that the sale
- 11 required the authority to abandon from the STB. At a
- minimum, the MOA should properly reflect the actions
- taken by Conrail to circumvent the historic
- 14 preservation process, and destroy historic property
- prior to any engagement by the STB, state, local
- 16 preservation authorities of the public.
- By leaving these items out of the MOA, the
- 18 STB is effectively erasing history and rewarding
- 19 actions taken by Conrail. Furthermore, the
- ²⁰ mitigation that the STB is considering is woefully
- inadequate in promoting a long-term preservation of
- 22 the Branch. Conrail has already sold its interest in

- the property, and will have no reason to participate
- in preservation once the abandonment is authorized.
- The "preservation methods" contemplated in
- 4 the MOA, are so big and unenforceable, but they are
- ⁵ effectively meaningless, and set a shocking precedent
- 6 for any other rail companies looking to offload their
- ⁷ historic properties. All the MOA requires of Conrail
- 8 is merely recordation, and additional documentation
- ⁹ and signage.
- In effect, Conrail must make a report,
- 11 put up some signs, and prepare a web page. Of
- 12 course, Conrail no longer owns the property, and it
- is not further defined within the MOA who this
- 14 responsibility falls to if it is not completed by
- 15 Conrail. The MOA does not even require Conrail to
- 16 pay to host the website it develops, nor does it
- impose any minimum standards for the information to
- be hosted on the website.
- 19 However, there is a fix to the situation.
- 20 As part of the local land use process, the JC HPC,
- 21 planning board and City Council have set up a
- 22 framework of what meaningful preservation action

- looks like. By adopting redevelopment plans that
- 2 preserve the embankment for open space, trail and
- 3 transportation uses.
- The HPC, City Embankment Coalition, and
- 5 many other consulting parties have long been
- 6 advocating for the STB to take full advantage of its
- 7 regulatory authority, and to take action that
- 8 reflect the need to preserve this structure that is
- ⁹ vital to the history of Jersey City. The guidance on
- 10 how to do this is there. The STB just needs to act
- on it. Thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Maggie. Liliane
- 13 Freitas please.
- MS. FREITAS: Hello.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Hi.
- MS. FREITAS: Hi. Thank you for the
- opportunity. Good evening, my name is Liliane
- 18 Freitas, I have lived in Jersey City since 1988. It
- 19 has been 35 years since I first looked at the 6th
- 20 Street embankment, and was mesmerized by its powerful
- 21 beauty. It has been 35 years, hoping to see the
- 22 embankment as an open space for all people to enjoy.

Page 85 2 This beautiful structure has been off 3 limits to the general public for a long time, and 4 now, more than ever, after a pandemic, threats of 5 flood and overdevelopment, we need green space so 6 badly for health and environmental benefits. 7 remember 20 plus years ago the first signs of 8 destruction and disrespect to the embankment were noticed when from one day to another all the tracks 10 that joined the parcels were removed by Conrail. 11 There was no public input, and no previous 12 notice to the residents of the neighborhood. 13 importantly, there was no consideration to the historic value and integrity of this structure as a 15 whole. My children were born and raised in Jersey 16 City. When they were small they used to call the 17 embankment the Jersey City pyramids, and tell their 18 friends that mummies and treasures were buried 19 inside. 20 These stone walls are our very own 21 pyramids, are a precious antiquity asset that must be 22 preserved at all costs. Something like that will

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 m l}$ never be built again. We cannot let it be lost
- forever. It represents our historic heritage.
- The 6th Street embankment has many benefits
- 4 to us. It is an architectural and engineering
- 5 marvel. It functions as the rain drainage to our
- 6 increasingly overdeveloped urban setting. It is a
- 7 haven for migratory birds and insects. It is also a
- 8 historic reminder of the industrial hub that was the
- 9 waterfront in Jersey City.
- Finally, to all the agencies and
- individuals involved in deciding the fate of the
- embankment, I beg you please use all your powers to
- 13 recognize the will of the people. Be part of a
- legacy of respect to our common wishes, and do not
- bend to the greed of just a few. Do not reward
- 16 Conrail for this unlawful sale, which has taken away
- the city's and the public's right to ownership.
- Think about the detrimental impact that
- 19 losing the embankment would have to our community,
- and for humanity. Please use all your powers to do
- what is right for the people. We the people, have
- been doing what we can for 21 years, fighting to keep

- the integrity of the embankment, to keep the
- 2 embankment dream alive.
- But ultimately, the power is in your
- 4 hands. Please do what is right. And thank you for
- 5 the opportunity. Thank you for the time.
- 6 MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you, appreciate it.
- 7 I will remind everybody to try and stick to the three
- 8 minutes as much as you can. Next up is Thomas
- ⁹ Slattery.
- MR. SLATTERY: Hi. My name is Tom
- 11 Slattery. I'm Assistant Corporation Counsel for the
- 12 City of Jersey City. The City echoes the statements
- by the many speakers heard already tonight, so I'm
- going to be brief. The OEA to this point has
- 15 generally stated that it lacks the authority to
- impose any significant conditions for abandonment in
- 17 the proposed MOA.
- The City believes that that conclusion is
- incompatible with the STB's broad powers mentioned
- earlier in the presentation. The approval of an
- unquestionably unlawful sale and circumvention of
- 22 historic preservation process would nullify the very

- 1 purpose of the laws and regulations at issue, and
- would render moot the public participation required
- 3 by law.
- The proposed MOA does not even make
- 5 mention of the illegal sale, and the sale could even
- 6 consider any mitigation of further destruction of the
- 7 embankment. Moreover, because Conrail has already
- 8 sold its interest in the property, it has no reason
- 9 to participate in efforts of documentation and
- 10 signage.
- While the City remains focused on
- 12 preservation of the Harsimus Branch embankment, you
- 13 cannot help but notice the signal that the current
- memorandum sends regarding other rail properties.
- 15 Rail operators can rely upon federal pre-emption when
- it's convenient to avoid local regulations, and then
- ignore federal jurisdiction when it is expedient to
- 18 do so.
- 19 That's an untenable situation.
- 20 Disincentivizing compliance with the ICCTA undermines
- the legitimacy of the STB at the expense of local
- 22 governments and the public interests. Jersey City

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 m l}$ implores the STB and the consulting parties not to
- 2 sign this MOA.
- If the agency has no legal authority
- 4 beyond the meager signage and documentation proposed,
- 5 then there's little need to pretend that rail
- 6 operators have to abide by abandonment requirements
- 7 at all. However, if, as the City contends, the STB
- 8 has the ability to withhold abandonment authority
- 9 until meaningful preservation is secure, including by
- 10 participation of the city, and the property's new
- 11 purchasers, it must do so.
- 12 Thank you very much.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you. Have a good
- 14 evening. Katrina Borisjuk?
- MS. BORISJUK: Yes. Hi. Can you hear me?
- MR. TABACHNICK: Sure can.
- MS. BORISJUK: Yeah. Don't worry about
- 18 butchering the last name. It happens all the time.
- MR. TABACHNICK: What's the right way to
- 20 say it?
- MS. BORISJUK: It's Katrina Borisjuk.
- Yeah, you were close. Hi everyone, I've been a

- 1 resident of Jersey City for over 17 years, and a
- 2 homeowner since 2011. I agree with everything that
- my neighbors have shared so far on this call, so I
- 4 will keep this brief, while adding my personal
- 5 perspective.
- I have enjoyed witnessing the amazing
- 7 growth of downtown and the broader Jersey City
- 8 community. Diversity is one of the city's greatest
- 9 strengths, especially of the people, but also of the
- 10 City itself, where the combination of historic and
- modern architecture makes the city beautiful,
- vibrant, and unbelievably livable.
- For the past 12 plus years I've lived on
- the border of the Harsimus Cove Historic District, on
- 15 3rd and Coal Street, so three blocks from the 6th
- 16 Street embankment. As health and wellness is one of
- my core values, I've been watching the work of the
- 18 City Planning Board, the Embankment Preservation
- 19 Coalition, and the Rails to Trails Conservancy, with
- 20 great anticipation of the embankment becoming a part
- of the east coast greenway.
- 22 Among other benefits to the community,

- this will create an amazing center of gravity for
- 2 healthy outdoor living, and outdoor activity in a
- 3 thriving neighborhood. Similar to how the High Line
- 4 and the Hudson River Park do so just across the river
- 5 from us in Manhattan.
- 6 Enabling the destruction of the embankment
- ⁷ instead would be a tragedy. As Jersey City continues
- 8 to grow and evolve, more than ever we need more green
- 9 space and more infrastructure. What we do not need
- is more development. There's construction
- everywhere with more and more condos and apartment
- units, and not enough green space, infrastructure or
- parking to support it.
- 14 You cannot ignore the reality that this
- would be the likely fate of the embankment if you
- 16 allow Conrail's premature and unlawful sale of this
- 17 property to proceed unchecked. The embankment is a
- treasure, with ecological, historic significance,
- 19 and great potential to serve the broader community of
- 20 Jersey City and beyond.
- I therefore urge the STB to do its job
- under Section 106, and find ways to avoid, minimize,

- or mitigate adverse effects to the Harsimus Branch,
- and other historic resources, and to protect them in
- 3 line with the perspectives of the identified
- 4 consultants, and the people of Jersey City.
- 5 The STB needs to recognize that it should
- 6 not permit abandonment without preservation
- 7 conditions, as this would be actively contributing to
- 8 the destruction of this natural and historic
- 9 resource, which would greatly alter the character of
- 10 this beautiful neighborhood for the worse. Thank you
- 11 for your time.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you. Ryan
- Williams?
- MR. WILLIAMS: Hi. I'm Ryan Williams.
- 15 I'm a Board member of the Embankment Preservation
- 16 Coalition, as well as Bike JC and Hudson County
- 17 Complete Streets. The embankment's green space and
- 18 right-of-way are desperately needed in the midst of
- 19 the densest urban environment in the U.S.
- The proposed MOA, including mitigations
- such as interpretative signage, and a commemorative
- website is totally insufficient to protect this

- 1 resource. Furthermore, it serves to reward Conrail
- for engaging in an unlawful sale, and for their
- ³ intransigence working towards a settlement. The
- 4 right-of-way should not be abandoned, and Conrail
- 5 should be held to account for its actions.
- I join the chorus of voices urging the OEA
- 7 not to permit abandonment of the right-of-way, or
- 8 otherwise remove protections from this critical
- 9 resource. Thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Ryan. David
- 11 Czehut?
- MR. CZEHUT: Hello. David Czehut, can you
- 13 hear me?
- MR. TABACHNICK: I messed up that one, but
- 15 yeah, I can hear you sorry.
- MR. CZEHUT: No worries. Not the worst
- 17 I've heard. Thank you very much for the opportunity
- 18 to speak. My name is David Czehut, and I'm a
- 19 resident and homeowner in the Harsimus Cove Historic
- District, and my home is a historic property
- immediately adjacent to the embankment. I'm it's
- 22 next door neighbor.

Page 94 I've never been contacted by Conrail, or 2 the STB, or any consultants representing them about 3 the potential impact that abandonment or removal of the embankment may have on my property. Removal of 5 the embankment would have disastrous, negative 6 consequences for my home, my family, and my 7 community. The purported sale of the embankment was 9 illegal, and Conrail should not be rewarded for 10 defying the law by having their belated abandonment 11 application approved. The current proposed MOA is 12 wholly unacceptable, as documenting the embankment, 13 it's not preservation. And if this is the only 14 condition for abandonment, it will destroy a vital 15 contributor to the neighborhood's history, character 16 and ecology. 17 And the embankment has an even stronger 18 role to play in our community going forward as a 19 responsible stewardship governed by strict, historic 20 preservation requirements. We'll turn this into a 21 public jewel of recreation and transportation. I 22 implore the STB to avoid the illegal sale of the

- embankment, reject Conrail's request for abandonment,
- and proceed in a direction that legally protects this
- yaluable resource, and strong historic preservation
- 4 requirements. Thank you.
- 5 MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks David. Again,
- 6 sorry about the last name. Next one up Tom
- 7 Ogorzalek?
- MR. OGORZALEK: Yep. That's close enough.
- 9 Thanks so much.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Tom.
- MR. OGORZALEK: I'm a resident of Jersey
- 12 City over 32 years now. I want to just thank the STB
- for allowing us the opportunity to speak. I want to
- start by kind of echoing pretty much everything I've
- 15 already heard this evening from my neighbors and
- 16 colleagues, and people I've grown to know over my
- 17 time here in Jersey City.
- So, I'll try to be brief, and I just kind
- of want to point out again to the STB the value that
- 20 rail right-of-ways have as a piece of green
- infrastructure in our urban environments, especially
- 22 urban environments that currently are becoming denser

Page 96 1 and denser. 2 Speaking specifically about the impact the 3 embankment has on our community, you've heard 4 numerous comments this evening regarding it as a 5 historical and cultural resource, but I can't 6 reiterate enough the resource it provides as a piece of green infrastructure, which includes not only the 8 sequestration of CO2, the ability to retain water in storms where we already have challenges in that area, 10 and in the greater downtown community. 11 But it also provides an incredible 12 ecological resource for biodiversity, for transitory 13 species, migratory species, and as a connective tissue out to the greater region. This is something 15 that we could never reproduce, so as a resource for 16 the City, the region, and the public, I strongly urge 17 the STB to listen to the comments, take the comments 18 to heart, and please act in a manner that would be 19 supportive of our community. Thank you. 20 MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks very much. 21 Julianna Dawson? 22 MS. DAWSON: Yes. Hello. I'm here. Hi.

- 1 My name is Julianna. I live on 7th Street in Jersey
- ² City, a block from the Harsimus Branch. I pretty
- much agree with most of the comments that I've heard
- 4 here tonight. I'll just quickly add a couple of my
- own thoughts. Losing this protection would no doubt
- 6 result in a devastating loss to our historic
- 7 neighborhood.
- 8 Historic structures and historic
- 9 neighborhoods should remain historic, that's why
- 10 historic districts are created, and why they need to
- 11 be enforced. I think Conrail should be held
- 12 accountable for its unlawful sale of the Branch, and
- meaningful protection should be established and
- 14 maintained.
- I think this site provides a really unique
- opportunity to connect an industrial revolution
- 17 remnant to the green revolution, and it's usefulness
- has not diminished. It gives us an opportunity to
- 19 provide the neighborhood with a natural forest that
- has grown on top, fresh air, storm water management,
- all of those, you know, the green components that
- 22 have been discussed here today.

Page 98 It also could be just as great for 2 transportation in the future as it once was, just 3 transportation in a different way, since it can be 4 connected, and serve as a link to the major biking 5 and walking greenways, which have been mentioned 6 during this meeting already. 7 If protected, it could provide an amazing 8 and unique opportunity for the transportation of people, and once it's lost it cannot be replaced. So 10 thank you for your time, and please consider the 11 voices that you hear here today. 12 MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks very much. 13 glad you can make it tonight. 14 MS. DAWSON: Thank you. 15 MR. TABACHNICK: Next is John Gomez. 16 MR. GOMEZ: Yes. Can you hear me? 17 MR. TABACHNICK: Sure can, sure can. 18 MR. GOMEZ: Thank you. Good evening. 19 I'll be very brief. When I first set out in 1999 to 20 organize a nonprofit historic preservation 21 organization, it was not hard for me to look for and 22 find like minded advocates, people filled with

- 1 extraordinary compassion and commitment,
- 2 resourcefulness and fighting spirit.
- Maureen Crowley, who you all must know by
- 4 now, was really my only model at that moment in
- 5 Jersey City time. She was, in my eyes, possessed
- 6 with preserving a railroad trestle of all things,
- 7 that could only be called a monument. At first, I
- 8 could not grasp her passion, her energy and her
- 9 drive. Who was this focused, determined,
- inspirational voice I wondered way back then.
- 11 Could I be just like her to save a
- powerhouse, a reservoir, a cobblestone street?
- Without missing a beat, backing down, or being
- 14 intimidated by public and private mega entities
- 15 seemingly endlessly entitled. I tried back then, and
- 16 I felt secure in shaping my own newly formed
- 17 nonprofit organization's vision, goals and dream.
- This was almost 25 years ago. Maureen
- 19 Crowley is still at it, the Embankment Preservation
- 20 Coalition is puttering along, as if it's the late
- 21 1990's still, as if her group has just formed for
- 22 the first time all cylinders burning. Whenever I try

- to wrap my head around her coalition's everlasting
- 2 courage to stand up to colossal rail corporations,
- and hungry developers, I honestly have to sit down,
- 4 breathe deeply, and try again to emulate her heart
- 5 and her genius.
- The Jersey City Landmarks Conservancy
- 7 exists because of Maureen Crowley. That has to be
- 8 said, and I wish I had said it much, much earlier.
- 9 Nothing before you is all that complicated. In fact,
- 10 it is quite simple. We are pleading with the STB to
- hear our pleas tonight and now, to reflect on our
- 12 revelations about Conrail's awful legacy in our city
- and in our state, and respond accordingly to this out
- of control, un-oversighted railroad conglomerate that
- wrongfully sold a historic resource to the highest
- bidder, and thought it was perfectly fine to do just
- 17 that.
- 18 Conrail has only demonstrated
- 19 shamelessness, disregard and disrespect, and it's
- time for it to stop here and tonight. Let this
- soul-less body know that treating communities and
- 22 precious historic resources in such reckless and

- 1 egregious manners ends. Send shockwaves out tonight.
- 2 Send Conrail's lawyers scrambling. Thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks John. Peter
- 4 Zirnis TV?
- 5 MR. ZIRNIS: Hi there. Hello. Sorry
- 6 about that. Hi there, my name is Peter Zirnis. I
- 7 was born and raised in Jersey City, and I have lived
- 8 here for the entirety of my 22 year life. The
- 9 embankment has been something significant, as a
- 10 significant part of my childhood, and adulthood, with
- my memories about the historic structure going as far
- back as I could remember.
- From what I understand this agreement
- really misses the mark of what it should do as the
- 15 MOA was developed to address adverse effects to
- historic properties within the area of potential
- 17 effect, but also indulging all these landlords that
- will be impacted by this agreement.
- 19 At the end of the day STB giving Conrail,
- the party that ignored us in the first place, has
- shown complete contempt and akin to which is the
- lawsuit in the last two decades. So much authority

- over the preservation for the historic structure is
- ² just kind of like crazy, and in general an insult to
- the community, and I greatly urge the STB to further
- 4 consider the implications of a current set of
- 5 conditions for Conrail. Thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you, Peter. Clara
- 7 Richardson?
- MS. RICHARDSON: Hello. Can you hear me?
- 9 MR. TABACHNICK: Sure can, hi.
- MS. RICHARDSON: Oh great, okay. Here I
- 11 am. My name is Clara Richardson. I'm a resident of
- 12 the neighborhood. I am really grateful for
- everything everyone has said this evening, some very
- 14 -- oh, I can't think of the word, but excellent
- voices. I'm a member of Brunswick Community Garden,
- which abuts the embankment at Brunswick Street.
- 17 And as a member of the Garden, I'm there
- 18 all year long. I have direct and close experience of
- 19 the benefits of the wall itself, and its forest
- 20 above. Garden members love the embankment for its
- beauty, and the shelter it brings to the garden.
- 22 It's amazing. The pink stonework is beautiful. It's

- 1 a unique living museum of how things were built at
- one time into a gorgeous structure.
- And the historic importance of the
- 4 railroad to our neighborhood. I've been a resident
- 5 and a homeowner in Jersey City for over 10 years, and
- 6 I would have to say the embankment brings home to me
- 7 every day the importance of railroads to the history
- 8 of the neighborhood.
- 9 You can touch the stone. It's cool on the
- 10 north side, and warm on the south side. The forest
- above has so many benefits, and people have spoken
- 12 eloquently about that. A website, or some signage,
- is no substitute for this marvelous, historic, stone
- structure, its forest, and everything all of that
- does for the neighborhood.
- So I would just ask you to please protect
- 17 this actual historic structure, and the possibilities
- 18 it has for the future, and the necessity it has for
- 19 today's neighborhood is the most important thing we
- have in this neighborhood. Thank you very much.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you, Clara, have a
- good evening. Wynn Wagenseil?

1	Page 104
1	MR. CROSS: I'm sorry Alan, what was the
2	name?
3	MR. TABACHNICK: Oh, Wynn Wagenseil?
4	MR. CROSS: Oh there we go, got you.
5	MS. WAGENSEIL: Can you hear me?
6	MR. TABACHNICK: Sure can.
7	MS. WAGENSEIL: Okay. All right. My name
8	is Wynn Wagenseil, and my perspective on the
9	embankment issue is based on my experience as an
10	occasional visitor to Jersey City from my home in
11	Southeastern North Carolina. In July of this year I
12	visited my sister, Beth Wall, a long-time resident of
13	Jersey City, and a participant in the Embankment
14	Preservation Coalition.
15	During the visit we climbed the 100 step
16	steel staircase to Jersey City Heights at sunrise,
17	and looked out at the dense structures that comprise
18	Jersey City and New York City. As our walk continued
19	on the pleasant path along the Hudson River, I
20	perceived that Jersey City is undergoing ambitious
21	real estate development, which will irrevocably alter
22	the landscape.

Page 105 My recent visit up north also included an 2 exploration of Little Island at Pier 55, which 3 represents an innovative, repurposing of a maritime port, now a site for all to enjoy native plants and 5 sweeping vistas. On previous visits, I walked on the 6 High Line, another example of creative urban renewal. 7 I recommend that Jersey City, while going 8 through its current transformation, use these New York City examples as a prototype for what can be 10 done with the embankment. Green infrastructure is as 11 significant and valuable as building apartments, 12 roads and bridges because it can choose to the 13 quality of life for current and new residents. 14 In addition, green infrastructure enhances 15 the destination for tourists. Based on my 16 conversations with my sister and my visits, I'm aware 17 of the layers of history, and the cultural 18 opportunities that are present in Jersey City. 19 All of these amenities contribute to 20 Jersey City's vibrant atmosphere, yet if you fail to 21 preserve the history and natural environment, as 22 would be the case, if the embankment is demolished, a

- 1 vital piece of the community, and a potential link to
- the east coast greenway is forever lost. Thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks very much. How
- 4 about Steve Krinsky?
- MR. KRINSKY: Hi. I don't see my video,
- 6 but okay. My name is Steve Krinsky. I'm a retired
- 7 teacher. I've lived in Jersey City since 1988 on 2nd
- 8 Street, just a few blocks. There I am. Just a few
- 9 blocks from the embankment. I remember the
- 10 embankment when I first moved here, the trestles
- 11 across Grove Street and the other streets were still
- 12 up.
- The area was decrepit. Underneath it was
- 14 dark and dangerous. Once the trestles came down, and
- 15 the area was cleaned up, we discovered what a
- treasure the embankment was. I haven't been up on
- the top for many, many years, but the walls alone
- were a beautiful monument to the rich history of the
- 19 railroads, and to the persistence of nature and
- 20 humanity.
- Jersey City today is a good place to live.
- 22 But it's crowded. We need more open space, more

- 1 green spaces. We need ways to protect ourselves from
- the excessive developments, all the high rises, and
- the construction. We need opportunities to protect
- 4 ourselves from the hectic pace of urban life. We
- 5 need a balance, and the embankment does some of that.
- The embankment has immense value in and of
- ⁷ itself. If it's torn down it can never be replaced.
- 8 The vision of a linear park that is part of the
- greenway of a larger greenway, and connects the
- 10 Hudson River to the Hackensack River, and beyond via
- the Bergen arches, is a wonderful idea. Please allow
- this plan, led by the Embankment Preservation
- 13 Coalition and Jersey City to move forward. Thank
- 14 you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Steve. Ayla
- 16 Schermer please.
- MS. SCHERMER: Hi, can you hear me?
- MR. TABACHNICK: Sure can. Hi.
- MS. SCHERMER: Okay. Great. Hello. Good
- 20 evening. My name is Ayla Schermer. I'm a Jersey
- 21 City resident, and the President of Bike JC, which is
- one of the lead consulting parties to the Section 106

- $^{
 m l}$ process. We are an advocacy organization whose
- 2 mission is to make Jersey City safe and welcoming for
- 3 bicyclists.
- We wholeheartedly support the plan set
- forth by the City of Jersey City, and by the
- 6 Embankment Preservation Coalition to preserve the
- 7 historic Harsimus Branch embankment, and turn it into
- 8 a public good that meets our city's modern needs.
- ⁹ Jersey City is a dense urban area, with a dire lack
- of green and open spaces.
- 11 The historic embankment has immense
- 12 potential to be transformed into just that, a one of
- 13 a kind, peaceful, concrete urban oasis for both
- recreation and transportation. It serves as a
- 15 critical link in many local, regional and even
- 16 national greenway plans. For example, as many others
- have said, there are proposals to connect the
- 18 embankment to the nearby Hudson River waterfront
- 19 greenway, the future Bergen arches greenway, the
- future Hudson greenway and even the east coast
- 21 greenway running all the way from Maine to Florida.
- 22 The embankment is also an essential

- lelement of many local master plans that were
- developed based on robust public outreach. The
- 3 Jersey City greenway connectivity plan and bike
- 4 master plan, are two of many such examples. Our
- 5 community's decades long vision of turning the
- 6 embankment into an open space trail and active
- 7 transportation corridor is very much compatible with
- 8 historic preservation.
- 9 Abandoning this historic resource, and
- opening it up for private development, however, is
- absolutely not. We must protect this historic public
- 12 asset, and turn it into the public good that our
- 13 community deeply desires, and very much deserves. I
- 14 look forward to the countless memories and
- 15 experiences that will be created there for
- 16 generations to come. Thanks very much.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you. Elma Mukaida
- 18 please?
- MS. MUKAIDA: Hello.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Hi.
- MS. MUKAIDA: Here I am. My name is Elma
- 22 Mukaida. I'm a 30 year resident of the Hamilton Park

- neighborhood, which is bordered to the south of the
- 2 Harsimus Branch embankment. In the years that I've
- lived in Jersey City, I've been amazed of the
- 4 history of our city, and how rich the downtown area
- is and development of our country.
- The embankment's construction brought in
- 7 workers from Ireland, Germany, Holland, Italy,
- 8 Poland, who created the beginnings of the melting pot
- 9 that is Jersey City today. Just in my neighborhood,
- 10 north of the embankment, we're blessed to have
- 11 preserved churches like Holy Rosary, St. Anthony of
- 12 Padua, St. Michael, as well as other historic
- buildings built by the immigrants who helped build
- 14 the railways.
- 15 Although most of the structure had been
- 16 removed, the embankment's elevated tracks had
- 17 extended to the west, toward the historic Harsimus
- 18 Branch cemetery, and those grounds were used in the
- 19 War of Independence, training in World War I and II,
- 20 and is a resting place for many Jersey City notables,
- 21 as well as Alexander Hamilton's son and family.
- 22 Besides its historic significance, it's

- 1 crucial to the environment for rainwater catchment,
- temperature reduction, and for flora and fauna.
- Jersey City development has greatly reduced our tree
- 4 canopy to a low 10.9 coverage, which ideally should
- 5 be 20 percent or more.
- 6 Development of the embankment would only
- 7 reduce our canopy, add to water runoff, temperature
- 8 increases, and yes, reduced emotional and physical
- 9 well-being citizens according to a 2015 Jersey City
- 10 tree canopy assessment. The embankment is the only
- undeveloped site left of downtown's elevated rail
- 12 lines, and the preservation of the embankment will
- serve as a permanent reminder of part of our beloved
- 14 Jersey City roots, and health of the environment and
- our people.
- Please preserve the embankment from
- development or being demolished. Thank you to the
- 18 STB for having this public comment time, and thank
- 19 you to all of those dedicated volunteers and
- volunteer groups, especially with the Embankment
- 21 Preservation. Thank you very much. Good night.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you very much.

Page 112 1 Faith Lau please? 2 MS. LAU: Hi. Thank you. 3 MR. TABACHNICK: Hi. MS. LAU: My name is Faith Lau. I'm a 5 homeowner in Jersey City for more than 15 years, and 6 if you count for my in-laws and my children, my family currently has three generations living here in 8 Jersey City. I'd like to comment on the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 process that 10 the STB is conducting. 11 The government needs to be proactive in ensuring environmental justice and urban well-being. 12 13 Rails to Trails programs have been so successful in 14 other parts of the country. This urban area deserves 15 the same prioritization of resources, and protections 16 that other areas have benefitted from. 17 Here's an opportunity to foster clean air 18 and social well-being for park space as many 19 articulate neighbors have added here, commented here 20 tonight. Not protecting the historical status will 21 effectively guaranty that this rare green space will 22 be paved over.

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1	This is especially important for a
2	community that still bears the burden of ill effects
3	from the railroads. I live on the waterfront, and we
4	are paying for environmental surveys, soil
5	replacement and indefinite regulatory oversight due
6	to toxicity from historic fill related to the
7	railroad expansion.
8	Railroads have a wonderful part in our
9	national and local history. This should be
10	celebrated and featured in public education, and
11	preserved for public immersive experiences more than
12	just signage. Following precedents set in other
13	communities throughout the country, unused rail lines
14	should be transformed for the direct benefit of the
15	surrounding communities, and be protected for the
16	cause of environmental justice.
17	Please support Jersey City and the
18	Embankment Coalition, and Rails to Trails in their
19	efforts to preserve the Harsimus Branch. Thank you.
20	MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Faith. Caryn
21	Rogoff?
22	MS. ROGOFF: Hi.

Page 114 MR. TABACHNICK: Hi. 2 MS. ROGOFF: All right. My name is Caryn 3 Rogoff, and I've been a resident of the Harsimus Cove 4 neighborhood in Jersey City for over 35 years. 5 many people tonight have noted, the people and the 6 government of Jersey City have worked for decades to 7 preserve the embankment, to preserve the historic 8 site, while reimagining those historic resources to improve our quality of life now. 10 Especially in this increasingly crowded 11 and hot urban areas like downtown Jersey City, we 12 desperately need trees, and we have lots of the 30 13 year old forest that have grown up right on the 14 embankment right here. We need it to absorb 15 rainwater, to absorb carbon dioxide and heat. And we 16 also need to support climate friendly modes of 17 transportation like bicycles and light rail that are 18 envisioned for the embankment. 19 Demolishing the embankment would wreak 20 havoc on this historic district in many ways, and to 21 offer some claps and a website is just woefully 22 inadequate. Finally, as the mother of two young

Page 115 adults who grew up here, I'm especially worried and 2 saddened about the growing skepticism in our country 3 that government can really make a positive 4 difference, and that it doesn't just represent really 5 those people with lots of resources. 6 So, this is really your opportunity to do 7 the right thing and represent the sentiment of the 8 residents of our community in this process, the way it should work. Conrail should be held accountable 10 for its unlawful sale, and I sincerely hope that the 11 STB will preserve jurisdiction over the embankment, 12 so that our vision that serves the wider community 13 can be realized. Thank you. 14 MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Caryn. I want to 15 go back to Marina Conlin, you weren't here when we 16 called you the first time, would you like to speak 17 now? 18 MS. CONLIN: Hi. Can you see me? 19 MR. TABACHNICK: Not yet, but you'll be 20 here in a second I think. 21 MS. CONLIN: You can hear me though? 22 MR. TABACHNICK: I can hear you fine.

- 1 There you go.
- MS. CONLIN: Okay. Thanks for taking me.
- 3 My name is Marina, and I am grateful for the
- 4 opportunity to speak. To this community the
- 5 embankment is just not a placeholder for future
- 6 development, it's an important piece of our heritage
- ⁷ that connects us to our past, and reminds us of the
- 8 struggles and triumphs of those that came before us.
- 9 There will never be another embankment
- 10 opportunity if this is lost, and the cost of such a
- 11 loss would be felt for generations. Listening in
- this meeting I am learning so much about the benefits
- of the embankment, and I'm very hopeful that we're
- 14 going to be able to save it.
- I was born in Jersey City, and now I have
- 16 children of my own to raise here, and I hope that
- 17 this is the last generation that has to fight for
- this beautiful green space, so thank you so much,
- 19 and I wish us all luck.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Marina. Colin
- 21 Eagan? Is Colin there? Is there a Colin? Oh, there
- ²² you go.

Page 117 1 Thank you for the MR. EGAN: Hi. 2 opportunity to speak. I will keep it brief. I'm a 3 resident of Jersey City. I have been following the 4 story of the embankment for many years, and the 5 extraordinary work of the Embankment Coalition, and also working with the city to try and preserve a 6 7 historic landmark. And I think that's what needs to be 9 emphasized here. It is a critically important 10 landmark, not just to the immediate area around it, 11 but to the story of the city itself. Jersey City's 12 waterfront, its industrial and rail history is deeply 13 important for the city to be able to continue to let both old and new residents remember it's how this 15 city got built. 16 And to me it's extraordinary that the STB 17 has the role, the authority to grant abandonment or 18 not, and yet Conrail simply ignored that, went around 19 it, tried to do what it wanted to do. And in the 20 fact of that there is not the kind of action you 21 would expect. Government exists to do what's in the 22 best interest of the people in general, not

- 1 necessarily a developer, and certainly not Conrail.
- In this instance the review, a thorough
- 3 review of the city within the redevelopment plans
- 4 that have been adopted and with the Embankment
- 5 Coalition is completely in order here. And if at
- 6 the end of that legitimately determine that the STB
- doesn't have the correct authority, or enough
- 8 authority to fully protect the embankment, and the
- 9 historic structures and resources around it, and the
- 10 answer is simply don't abandon it.
- 11 There's no pre-requisite that it be
- 12 abandoned. In fact, many arguments in terms of
- 13 national interest can be made that it should not be
- 14 abandoned. And I will say that the idea that the
- 15 mitigation to the negative effect of destroying the
- embankment, that signage and documentation, that's an
- 17 autopsy. That's a post mortem.
- We have the landmark here, the historic
- 19 structure here, the resource here. You don't talk
- about what you can do after it's allowed to be
- destroyed. You talk about not destroying it. So
- 22 those are my comments, thank you for listening.

Page 119 1 MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Colin, appreciate 2 it. Next up is Emmanuelle Morgen. 3 MS. MORGEN: Hi. Apologies for the delay. MR. TABACHNICK: No problem. 5 MR. CROSS: Go ahead if you're ready. 6 MS. MORGEN: Thank you. I'm just pulling 7 up my notes. On behalf of Hudson County -- my name 8 is Emmanuelle Morgen, I'm the President of Hudson 9 County Complete Streets, and we're a coalition of 10 safe and sustainable transportation advocacy groups 11 in Hudson County. And on behalf of HCCS I'm writing 12 to urge the Surface Transportation Board to ensure 13 the full environmental protection, preservation and 14 integrity of the 6th Street embankment prior to 15 approving any abandonment of its site by Conrail. 16 The embankment is a critical segment in 17 Jersey City and Hudson County's plans for a connected 18 greenway network that will provide much needed open 19 space, and safe, off road transportation solutions 20 for pedestrians and other vulnerable travelers in 21 Jersey City. 22 Jersey City is one of the fastest growing

- cities in the United States, and parks investment has
- 2 not kept pace with its population growth. In fact,
- ³ last year the Trust for Public Land dropped Jersey to
- 4 these rankings in its annual park score index, in
- 5 part because the City's average park size is .6
- 6 acres, compared to the parks score median of 5.4
- ⁷ acres.
- 8 The City's overall acreage per capita of
- 9 open space is below the national standard, and New
- 10 York City's urban standard. We appreciate the Office
- of Environmental Analysis's 2009 conclusion that
- 12 granting abandonment could cause adverse effects on
- this historic resource, and we ask the OEA to include
- 14 robust protections for the conservation of this site
- in its memorandum of agreement prior to approving
- 16 Conrail's request for abandonment.
- We stand with the Embankment Preservation
- 18 Coalition, and the City of Jersey City in our mission
- 19 to preserve the embankment for public benefit. Thank
- 20 you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks very much
- Emmanuelle. Patricia Giordan? Is somebody there?

Page 121 All right. How about if we move on to Eleana Little? 2 MR. CROSS: Patricia is trying to turn on 3 right now. MR. TABACHNICK: Okay. 5 MR. CROSS: You could go ahead and unmute 6 your mic Patricia. 7 MS. GIORDAN: Hello? MR. TABACHNICK: We hear you. MS. GIORDAN: Can you hear me? 10 MR. TABACHNICK: We can hear you. 11 MS. GIORDAN: Okay. My name is Patricia 12 Giordan. I am a resident of Jersey City. I've lived 13 here for 37 years. I live in the Heights, so I'm not a neighbor to the embankment. However, wherever you 15 live in Jersey City, the embankment is a very 16 important part of city life. I don't have to say 17 everything that other people have said before. It's 18 all true. 19 And my goal is just to give my voice to 20 residents of the city to say we support the 21 preservation of the embankment, and for all the good 22 it's going to do as everyone else has said it would.

Page 122 1 Thank you. 2 MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Patricia. Eleana 3 Little? MS. LITTLE: Hi, can you hear me? MR. TABACHNICK: Yeah, I hear you fine. 6 MS. LITTLE: Great. Thanks. My name is 7 Eleana Little. I'm a resident of Jersey City, and a 8 past President of the Harsimus Cove Association. 9 Harsimus Cove is the neighborhood adjacent to the 10 embankment, and it includes the Harsimus Cove 11 historic district, which would be adversely affected 12 in any scenarios where the embankment were to be 13 developed instead of being preserved. 14 You will also note the Harsimus Cove 15 Association's current President, John Monahan, also 16 gave remarks earlier. So I do want to thank the 17 Surface Transportation Board for holding this 18 meeting tonight, and taking time to listen to the 19 community, and I urge you to truly take into account 20 the perspectives offered by the many community 21 members here tonight. 22 I want to support the comments made on

- July 14th by the Embankment Preservation Coalition,
- the Jersey City Landmark Conservancy, the National
- 3 Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Rails to
- ⁴ Trails Conservancy.
- 5 We urge you to consider master plans and
- 6 redevelopment plans. Currently, redevelopment plans
- ⁷ in Jersey City contingent on litigation would allow
- 8 for the preservation of the embankment historic
- 9 structure for future use as a park, and possible
- 10 future light rail infrastructure.
- 11 Access to urban green space is a
- 12 critically important need here in Jersey City,
- especially in Harsimus Cove, which does not currently
- have an urban green space, or a green park. In
- 15 addition, in the years since the railroad has been
- abandoned, an ecosystem has blossomed on the
- 17 embankment.
- 18 Trees have grown and provided habitat for
- 19 birds and shade for residents. Native plant species
- 20 have taken root. So the proposed use as a natural
- linear park connecting, as part of a larger greenway,
- would be an incredible resource for Jersey City, and

- our urban ecosystem, and would be entirely consistent
- with the goals of preservation.
- Further, in a city with substantially less
- 4 public transportation available compared to
- 5 neighborhoods of similar population density across
- 6 the river, opportunities to expand public
- ⁷ transportation should also be a major consideration.
- 8 The potential for future light rail infrastructure
- 9 would also be consistent with historic preservation
- 10 goals by furthering its use as a transportation
- 11 corridor.
- Robbing Jersey City residents of these
- opportunities to maximize both public good and
- 14 historic preservation, as proposed by the Embankment
- 15 Preservation Coalition, and instead, allowing
- destruction of the structure would constitute an
- adverse effect. We urge you to, as per Section 106,
- 18 explore ways to avoid, minimize or mitigate adverse
- 19 effects to the Harsimus Branch and other historic
- 20 resources.
- We ask you to conduct a more robust review
- 22 process that includes the effects of development

- 1 versus preservation as a public good. If the STB
- 2 cannot impose the ways to mitigate adverse effects to
- the Harsimus Branch, then abandonment permission
- 4 should not be granted.
- 5 A no action alternative is preferrable to
- 6 destruction of this resource. As others have said,
- why set a precedent that shows railroads that there
- 8 is no consequence for illegal sales? Please do the
- 9 right thing, and help preserve this resource for the
- 10 community. Thank you for your time.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Eleana. Steve
- 12 Lipski please.
- MR. LIPSKI: Present. Hi. Steve Lipski,
- 14 lifelong resident of Jersey City, former Councilman,
- 15 former Chairman of the Redevelopment Board, former
- 16 CEO of the Jersey City Economic Development
- 17 Corporation, and current Jersey City Planning Board
- 18 Commissioner.
- 19 Before I begin I would just like to say my
- wife, County Commissioner Yraida Aponte-Lipski wanted
- to sign-up tonight to speak. She has a County
- 22 Commission meeting tonight, and was afraid she

Page 126 wouldn't be able to speak, but she will be submitting 2 a letter to Surface Transportation Board opposing 3 abandonment, and encouraging no action by your Board be taken. 5 For the first part, I'm going to stay 6 focused primarily on the memorandum. In the first paragraph it says, "Whereas, on January 6, 2009, 7 8 Conrail et al, jointly filed a verified notice of 9 exemption for Conrail to abandon, and to discontinue 10 service." For me, customarily, entities seeking an 11 exemption from a public body, are held to higher 12 standards for the public good in exchange for such an 13 exemption, and this MOA does not rise to that bar. 14 In the fifth paragraph it says your own 15 environmental analysis recommended that the Board 16 impose a condition barring Conrail from consummating 17 the proposed abandonment until Section 106 -- the 18 Section 106 process is completed, and within the 38 19 pages of this memorandum, 24 are invited signatory 20 pages, 15 of which those who were invited to sign in 21 support of this memorandum agreement, I know 22 categorically and patently oppose it.

Page 127 On page 2 it says that your own OEA 2 determined in consultation with the Section 106 3 consulting parties, that portions of the Harsimus 4 Branch control point Waldo to Maron Boulevard is 5 eligible for listing on the National Register as the 6 Pennsylvania Railroad Harsimus right-of-way historic 7 district. Abandoning it, and just letting it be 9 potentially sold is not going to honor such a 10 designation. Your Board says that it is considering 11 potential post-abandonment activities on historic 12 properties where it customarily doesn't, but in this 13 one it does. But then on page 3 you say you have no 14 authority to enforce any post-settlement agreement. 15 So, I'm not going to go much -- I can't, I 16 only have about 10 seconds, so the Board's ability to 17 impose involuntary mitigation to resolve adverse 18 effects is not in place, so my humble suggestion is 19 don't abandon, take no action, and allow citizens of this great city, along with the community groups and 20 21 our elected officials to seek a more prudent outcome. 22 Thank you for hearing me.

Page 128 1 MR. TABACHNICK: All right. Thank you 2 I think that completes our pre-registered Steve. 3 list of speakers, and thank you all for staying within, or close to the three minute timeframe. And 5 I appreciate all the comments. We're now going to go 6 and shift over to the other attendees who would like 7 to speak tonight. And I started this afternoon, now it's 9 If you're interested in speaking tonight we tonight. 10 request that you raise your hand in the Zoom meeting, 11 and we'll notify you when it's your turn to speak. 12 At that time I will introduce you, and your 13 microphone and camera will be turned on by one of the 14 moderators. 15 Again, please keep your remarks within 16 three minutes, so we can have as many folks speaking 17 as possible up to our four hour meeting time limit. If you don't have a chance to speak during this 18 19 meeting, or don't want to speak during the meeting, 20 either because you just don't want to speak, or we 21 run out of time, you can submit written comments of

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course, either via email, direct mail, snail mail, or

- through our online system, and I'll explain about how
- 2 to enter comments into our online system towards the
- ³ end of the meeting.
- So please raise your hand if you would
- 5 like to be called on to speak.
- 6 MR. CROSS: So it looks like we have Joann
- McKee, you're first.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Yeah, thanks Matt.
- 9 Joann?
- MR. CROSS: Can you please unmute Joann?
- MS. MCKEE: Okay.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Hi Joann.
- MS. MCKEE: Hi. My name is Joann Brennan
- 14 McKee. I've been a resident of Hamilton Park
- 15 Historic District for 37 years. Sorry. I also had a
- 16 40 year career with the U.S. Environmental
- 17 Protection Agency in Region 2. I understand federal
- 18 process and public participation.
- 19 The fact is that Conrail violated federal
- 20 regulations, your regulations, Conrail's illegal sale
- should be voided, and you should make them go back
- 22 and follow the regs. Thank you.

Page 130 1 MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Joann. 2 on to Diane Kaese. 3 MS. KAESE: (Audio issues) MR. TABACHNICK: Diane, your audio was a 5 little scratchy, could you send in those comments in 6 writing, so we have a copy of the real, of the full 7 text possibly? Just email it to me, that would be 8 great. Thanks. Next up is Tony Borelli. MR. BORELLI: Hi. Can you hear me? Tony 10 Borelli, 262 8th Street. I have lived about two 11 blocks away from the embankment for 26 years. 12 also the Vice President of the Consulting Party Bike 13 J.C. We consider this site unique for cycling 14 purposes. 15 We generally focus on the creation of 16 protected bike lanes on streets, partly because 17 Jersey City is basically all streets, and most places 18 people want to go on a bike or otherwise are on 19 That's a useful way to get around. We streets. 20 support the creation of greenways for somewhat 21 different reasons. 22 Some of those uses tend to be more

Page 131 recreational, they can be a short trip with your kids 2 to putter around for half a mile, maybe teach them 3 how to ride bikes, or for very long trips, for very adventuresome cyclists and also hikers. Maybe going 5 from state to state in a pleasant environment well 6 away from car traffic. 7 This particular site seems to have strong 8 potential to do both. It's a pleasant greenway that 9 actually goes someplace locally. If you go to the 10 western end you have access to the growing districts 11 that sort of surround White Eagle Hall, with lots of 12 entertainment, arts venues, restaurants, shopping, et 13 cetera, up and down Newark Avenue in that area. 14 If you were to ride to the eastern end 15 you're on the doorstep of Newport with the mall 16 obviously, but also lots of dense residential 17 development there already, office buildings, a light 18 rail stop, a path station. That's a rare combination 19 of things to find in one corridor, you know, cutting 20 right through the middle of downtown Jersey City. 21 And that's something that's precious and 22 can't be allowed to go by the boards. So for all of

- those reasons we strongly urge that the corridor be
- 2 preserved for those purposes, and for all the other
- beneficial uses you've heard about tonight. Thank
- 4 you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Tony, appreciate
- 6 it. Jennifer Meyer?
- 7 MS. MEYER: Hello?
- MR. TABACHNICK: Hi there. We hear you
- ⁹ fine.
- MS. MEYER: Hi. You hear me okay? Thank
- 11 you. Thanks for hosting the meeting. My name is
- Jennifer Meyer, and I have worked with fellow
- community members as far back as 1995 to preserve the
- ¹⁴ historic Harsimus Branch and its embankment, so that
- it could be acquired by Jersey City as a right-of-way
- 16 for reuse as public greenspace trail, and future
- 17 transportation infrastructure.
- 18 Thousands of people inside and outside of
- 19 Jersey City have worked in support of this project
- 20 for over 25 years, and it's at least through five
- 21 mayors and six administrations to protect this
- 22 precious asset. The coalition and the public have

Page 133 prevailed to this point against huge odds, against 2 powerful non-compliant railroads, powerful, financial 3 real estate and sometimes political interests because we always have engaged with everyone involved, and 5 work in good faith fighting for adherence to 6 municipal, county, state, federal and railroad laws 7 and regulations. People need to have faith in our 9 institutions and our laws, and when we disagree with 10 them we've worked through the system to advocate and 11 make changes through our local, state, federal 12 legislatures and judicial systems, the way it is 13 supposed to be done. We have faith and respect for the STB 15 regulatory agency, and we acknowledge that much work 16 has been done around this truly unique case, but 17 quite frankly, Conrail's original sin of illegally 18 selling the Harsimus Branch and ignoring the STB's 19 authority and disrupting the normal course of 20 abandonment phases has perverted the entire process. 21 From the STB's performance and 22 accountability report of 2021, I quote Chairman

- Oberman, "The Board has remained focused on
- fulfilling its core mission, the efficient, timely
- 3 and sound resolution of surface transportation issues
- and disputes subject to its jurisdiction."
- 5 I think you would agree that Conrail's
- 6 antics have robbed all of us of that, which is
- 7 efficient, timely and sound. It's caused so many
- 8 people, including your agencies, so much time, money
- 9 and justice, and interferes absolutely with the core
- mission at every step since 2005.
- 11 Further on, your report states that the
- 12 first strategic goal of the STB is to protect and
- 13 further the public interest in surface transportation
- 14 matters. To ensure that the railroad restructuring
- mergers, acquisitions, constructions and abandonments
- are consistent with the public interest, and that any
- 17 resulting economic environmental or operational harm
- is minimized to the extent practicable.
- In short, consideration of environmental
- 20 concerns in agency decision making consistent with
- 21 existing laws and regulations. And once again,
- 22 Conrail's actions have subverted all of that and

- 1 prevented the STB from guiding this case, along with
- what would be a normal course.
- 3 So don't let me set this precedent that
- 4 will allow this kind of miscarriage of justice and
- 5 time wasting, over the process happen again.
- ⁶ Finally, we hear the STB does not have jurisdiction
- 7 to dictate what happens to the property
- 9 post-abandonment, but I ask you to look deeper,
- 9 quoting again from your document, the Congress gave
- 10 STB sole jurisdiction over rail mergers,
- 11 consolidations, and abandonments of existing rail
- 12 lines, and new rail line construction.
- Exempting STB approved transactions from
- 14 $\,$ federal anti-trust and state and municipal laws. The
- 15 Board has authority, which provided under the STB
- 16 Reauthorization Act, to investigate issues of
- 17 national or regional significance on its own
- 18 initiative.
- 19 This is an issue of regional significance
- 20 for us, and allowing your regulations to be flouted
- 21 by a railroad resulting in so much pain for so many
- 22 people, and letting that stand as a precedent will be

- a matter of national significance. Thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you. Next up is
- 3 Gabby Feliu, and please try to stay to the three
- 4 minutes so we can get everybody in. Thanks.
- 5 MR. FELIU: You got it. Okay. Thank you.
- 6 So my name is Gabby Feliu. I am a Harsimus Cove
- 7 homeowner, and my second decade here. And I'm also
- 8 on the Board of the Harsimus Cove Association, which
- 9 is also a consulting party. Thank you for the
- opportunity to speak. You've already heard the
- overwhelming facts, the rich history, the legal
- 12 arguments, all solid reason, and the heartfelt
- sentiment from our residents, our leaders, our
- 14 municipality.
- 15 You've also heard how valued this unique
- treasure is. Please don't ignore us. Don't dismiss
- 17 it. Members of the STB, you've heard the expression,
- think globally, act locally. Needless to say, this
- is much more than a local issue. It is a regional
- issue with global impact. We're all members of that
- 21 same global society.
- We all deal with bureaucracy. We

- 1 appreciate that you have a job to do, and a career to
- pursue, but you also have a moral compass. We know
- 3 that each of you as humans are exactly like we are.
- 4 You care, you have families, and you think about your
- 5 future and theirs.
- I'm asking you to ask yourselves what is
- 7 right? Where does your moral compass needle pull?
- 8 You have the opportunity to make a real, and a very
- ⁹ tangible, meaningful difference in all of our lives,
- 10 now and for future generations. While you do need to
- 11 follow a process, you also know right from wrong.
- You're smart, you're crafty, you can find
- 13 a way, and we have provided much that to pull from.
- 14 I'm appealing to your sense of reason and your moral
- 15 judgment. You know what the right decision is, so
- 16 please, please follow that through. Your conscience
- will thank you for the rest of your life, and you,
- 18 yes all of you, Matt, Adam, Alan, Karen and all of
- 19 your coworkers, you can share in the pride of knowing
- that you made it a very positive and everlasting
- 21 difference, thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Gabby. Let's move

Page 138 on to Peter Pfohl. 2 MR. PFOHL: Hi. Thanks Alan, can you hear 3 me? MR. TABACHNICK: Sure can. MR. PFOHL: Good evening. I'm Peter 6 I serve as regulatory counsel for the LLCs and the Albanese Group, which are the owner and the 8 contract purchaser of the embankment properties. I've listened very carefully to the comments tonight, 10 and I know they're all very heartfelt. 11 In my brief time, I do want to try to 12 clear up three misinformation charges that we believe 13 have been unfairly lodged. First, the charge that there's been a lack of review, or a lack of public 15 engagement. Make no mistake, the 106 review process 16 has been exhaustive. 17 It's been eight years since the 18 reinstitution of the proceeding in 2015. It's not 19 been circumscribed in any way as we've heard claims 20 of tonight. The public has been fully engaged, over 21 70 parties have been participating as consulting 22 parties, there's parties of record in the proceeding,

- seven public meetings have been held, 2,000 written
- 2 comments have been received and responded to by OEA,
- 3 and eight exhaustive written assessments, spanning
- 4 over 1,000 pages.
- No one has been excluded. This is the
- 6 most comprehensive Section 106 review ever undertaken
- by the STB, or even by its predecessor, the ICC,
- 8 which goes back 50 to 100 years since the National
- 9 Historic Preservation Act was enacted. The public
- 10 has not been deprived from engaging.
- 11 Second, we heard claims that the
- embankment walls are being destroyed or destructed by
- 13 the abandonment. That's simply not true. Make no
- 14 mistake, abandonment approval will not lead to the
- destruction of the embankment walls. Rumors that my
- 16 client will, or even can demolish the embankment
- 17 blocks are totally false.
- The STB's decision simply allows a 20 year
- out of service rail line to cease being a common
- 20 carrier rail line. The railroad encumbrance on the
- 21 property is lifted. That is it. No embankment wall
- removal is sought. The embankment walls will not be

- demolished by any STB decision.
- Finally, contrary to the wishes of some,
- 3 the STB simply has no jurisdiction or laws for zoning
- 4 and development as some seem to think they do. That
- does not mean there are no protections. There are.
- 6 Development of the embankments and zoning is
- 7 controlled by the city, and fully protects the
- 8 public. Also, the embankments are protected under
- 9 local Preservation Act protections as Ms. O'Neill
- 10 acknowledged tonight.
- In fact, the recently passed zoning by the
- 12 City Council already, already mandates that blocks 2
- through 6 be used as a park, subject to a settlement
- 14 agreement. And to be clear, it's been a massive,
- 15 local public engagement in that process with many
- 16 public hearings over many years. Many of you have
- been involved in that process, and it's unclear to me
- why no one acknowledges that process or restrictions.
- 19 Again, local protections are fully built
- into the local zoning and planning review process,
- the public has been fully involved in that process,
- 22 and the STB abandonment approval does not change or

- 1 affect those protections. We strongly believe the
- only way to final settlement in this proceeding, and
- for the property to promptly be developed as a public
- 4 park, accessible to the public, modeled on the High
- 5 Line is for the STB to complete the Section 106
- 6 review, and authorize the abandonment.
- We urge prompt approval, for that vision
- 8 that we all seem to support can finally be realized.
- 9 Thanks for the time, Alan.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks, Peter. Ben
- 11 Schwartzbach please?
- MR. SCHWARTZBACH: Hi there. Can you hear
- 13 me?
- MR. TABACHNICK: Yeah. Hi Ben.
- MR. SCHWARTZBACH: Okay. All right.
- 16 Thank you. I'm Ben Schwartzbach. I'm a resident of
- 17 Jersey City who lives on the same block as the
- section of the embankment. I urge the STB to
- 19 consider two ways to minimize and mitigate adverse
- effects in the neighborhood, and Jersey City as a
- whole when it comes to the embankment.
- 22 As others have said, there are already

- 1 plans proposed to not only preserve the embankment,
- 2 but also elevate its impact on the neighborhood. The
- 3 embankment serves as an important reminder of the
- 4 impact of railways on the development of the area,
- 5 and the crucial economic connections that turned the
- 6 tri-state area into what it is today.
- I have young nieces and nephews who walk
- 8 by the embankment almost daily. In a day and age
- 9 where they're used to ordering something on Amazon,
- 10 and receiving it the next day, preserving the
- 11 embankment for future generations will keep this
- 12 important history alive, and keep Jersey City's
- 13 historical uniqueness intact.
- I feel that some 24 by 30 inch six inch
- 15 signs, or a website, are woefully insufficient, and
- 16 could never convey this history anywhere near as well
- 17 as far as the embankment itself. Again, I urge the
- 18 STB to consider -- to reconsider it's draft MOA, and
- 19 use your power under Section 106 to take a historic
- 20 piece of Jersey City, and help make it even better.
- 21 Thank you for your time today.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks, Ben. Next up is

- 1 Paula Mahayosn.
- MS. MAHAYOSN: Mahayosn. Thank you. My
- name is Paula Mahayosn, President and Board Trustee
- 4 Jersey City Parks Coalition. The JCPC is the City's
- 5 nonprofit partner for parks and open spaces. We
- 6 manage activities and events, maintain gardens,
- advocate for playgrounds and conserve history.
- 8 On behalf of the 30 JCPC members, we are
- 9 attending to advocate the preservation of history.
- 10 We urge the Surface Transportation Board to join our
- mission to protect the Harsimus Branch embankment,
- 12 and all the historic sites and districts along the
- 13 Harsimus Branch from the harm that can result from
- the Board's decision to abandon the rail line.
- 15 Conrail cannot abandon the property
- 16 without STB setting specific conditions to protect
- 17 the historic embankment structure, and the 20 year
- 18 natural urban forest that has been growing. To
- 19 please hold Conrail accountable for their actions.
- 20 We thank the city of Jersey City, and the Jersey City
- 21 Council members for investing resources to develop
- 22 and push forward the 6th Street redevelopment plan.

Page 144 1 The City has partnered with the community, 2 local nonprofits and developers to create a plan to 3 protect and include public access designs to the embankment, and the urban forest for residents and 5 visitors. The embankment is a public asset we cannot 6 lose. The City's actions demonstrates that they have heard Jersey City residents, and developed a master 8 plan to protect the embankment and the surrounding area. 10 Again, we urge the STB to do the same. 11 Outside the 20 year policy conflict the importance 12 you've heard residents speak of the importance of 13 open space, the active recreation to the east coast 14 greenway Rails and Trails plan, and natural storm 15 water mitigation benefits, I would like to present 16 another view. 17 Arts and education for our residents 18 nationally. The embankment structure and the flora 19 and fauna itself has inspired local artists to create 20 in the fall of 2022, the embankment -- already that 21 was produced. I will reference from an embankment 22 website. The exhibit ran from November 1st to

Page 145 December 16th, at NJCU. The work ranged from frames 2 and paintings to sculptures and installations, 27 3 artists approaches various aspects of historical Pennsylvania railroad, Harsimus Branch and its 5 massive stone embankment in downtown Jersey City, the 6 past, the present. 7 The possibilities hauled freight into the 8 New York Harbor are explored. Some will suggest 9 attitudes towards land used in place of corporate 10 practices, or governmental policy that kept the site 11 from being benefitted by the neighborhood. Again, we 12 urge the STB to be part of our mission to ensure the 13 historic preservation of the embankment, preserve 14 our quality of life, and protect our inspiration to 15 create art, document history, as part of our 16 educational history and future outdoor classroom. 17 Quoting from the natural history 18 organization, history education matters. Studying 19 the past helps us make sense of the present seeing 20 forward into the future. History education is 21 essential for participatory citizenship, knowing

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where we came from helps us understand where we're

- 1 going.
- In the process, studying the past promote
- 3 empathy and hones research writing and analytical
- 4 skills. Thank you for listening, and please do not
- 5 take this beautiful space from our artists and our
- 6 children. Thank you.
- 7 MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Paula. Annie
- 8 Kessler?
- 9 MS. KESSLER: Okay. Hi. I'm Annie
- 10 Kessler. I founded the Harsimus Cove Association
- many years ago, and it's so heartwarming to see how
- well represented it is today, along with so many
- other people that I love and respect, and that make
- 14 Jersey City as wonderful as it is a place.
- 15 I've lived in Harsimus Cove for 40 years
- 16 in Jersey City for 41 years. Our house was built in
- 17 1885. It's a strong and sound and beautiful as it
- 18 was when it was built, as are the walls of the
- 19 embankment. When I walk by them I am in awe, and I
- think about the people who planned that, and who
- 21 constructed it.
- 22 Their holes where they stuck their things

- in to move them, it's just so important to have, and
- if signage is going to make a difference to people
- like that does to me, I would be very surprised.
- 4 It's irreplaceable. I'm as much in awe of the
- 5 people, the heroes of the Embankment Preservation
- 6 Coalition, who have stuck with this fight for so
- ⁷ long, and some of you have talked so eloquently about
- 8 them.
- 9 I just want to talk from a personal
- 10 perspective. I'm in my late 70's, and health, mental
- 11 health and physical health are something we really
- 12 have to attend to. And walking in nature as we
- know, is so important, and for both of those things.
- 14 Also, the air that we breathe, a pulmonologist
- 15 recently told me that of course everybody, especially
- the children in Jersey City have asthma, to one
- degree or another.
- This is something that's very personal and
- 19 real. And I want to see the embankment developed in
- the way the Embankment Coalition has been seeing it
- 21 for a long time, to really happen. If the STB is
- really as powerless as you presented it at the

- beginning of this event, that worries me a lot. 1
- But I've heard it suggested that if it
- turns out to be true then just don't do anything.
- 4 That makes a lot of sense too. So, do think about
- 5 it, and congratulations to everybody who's made
- 6 these incredible comments. Because I've been riveted
- 7 this whole time, and I thought I was going to be
- 8 aggravated this whole time. Thank you. Bye-bye.
- 9 MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks very much. Melida
- 10 Rodas please. You're on mute. There you go.
- MS. RODAS: Sorry, can you shut that down
- 12 please? Sorry.
- MR. TABACHNICK: No problem.
- MS. RODAS: Yes. I just wanted to really
- 15 echo everything that everyone has said, everyone is
- 16 completely and utterly prepared, intelligent and
- socially conscious. The only thing I could possibly
- add to this is just going, it's impossible for me
- 19 not to think of the High Line when thinking of the
- embankment.
- 21 And just you could read right on the
- website where the High Line itself was once destined

- for demolition, and luckily like we're arguing now,
- that community rallied together to repurpose it
- instead, creating the park that exists now.
- And it actually became a global
- 5 inspiration to other cities. When they were trying
- 6 to develop ideas to, you know, to see what they would
- 7 do with the lands, they got a response from people
- 8 all over the world. It's a perfect example, you
- 9 know, we don't have to live very far, or just across
- 10 the river to see the incredible possibilities.
- Now the High Line is like 1.45 miles long.
- 12 It's a greenway, featuring 500 species of plants and
- 13 trees, and because I myself am an artist, as much as
- 14 I am a nature lover, I appreciate everything that all
- of you were saying before. I mean now the High Line
- 16 serves as a place where they host public programs,
- 17 community meetings, teen engagement, and they have
- worldclass artwork and performances there, free to
- 19 the public.
- If we cannot see that as an example, as
- 21 almost an exact equal to what the embankment can and
- 22 should be, then I think there's something wrong with

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 m l}$ us. I think everyone across the river looks at
- Jersey City like almost as an extension of New York
- because we are -- we have a vibe. Everyone knows
- 4 Jersey City now.
- We are doing amazing things. We have
- 6 nothing to be jealous about of New York because we
- 7 are doing so much. The last thing I'll say is that I
- 8 urge the Surface Transportation Board to protect the
- 9 Harsimus Branch, its embankment, and all the historic
- 10 sites and districts along the Branch, from the harm
- that can result from a Board decision to abandon the
- 12 railroad.
- Government is here to protect the people.
- 14 It's here to protect the children that exist in our
- 15 neighborhoods. Because I am also a former educator,
- 16 I have a whole other page that the devotes to the
- 17 psychological benefits of nature. I want to respect
- 18 everyone's time.
- The fact that it is already 8 o'clock, so
- I won't get into it, but we would be fools not to
- think that transforming, taking away nature from the
- 22 city, taking away from the children, and the

- 1 psychological benefits that come with coexisting with
- 2 nature. It baffles me to think that our city
- 3 government would allow something to happen to get in
- 4 the way of that.
- 5 Thank you for your time, and thank you. I
- 6 trust that you'll make the right decision, and thank
- you so much for your time.
- MR. TABACHNICK: All right. Thank you.
- 9 And I just want to remind folks if you need more
- 10 time, or you want to submit written comments, if your
- 11 statement is like too long to go within the three
- minute window, feel free to email us. You know,
- email me, you know, the statement, or any backup
- materials, whatever you want to submit, and we'll you
- know, keep it on file and review it, so I just want
- to remind everybody of that.
- Next up is Natalia.
- MS. GALLAGHER: Hi. I don't know why I'm
- 19 reversed, but I'm going to keep on going.
- MR. TABACHNICK: You must be very athletic
- 21 because your horse.
- MS. GALLAGHER: Very artistic here, okay.

Page 152 So honestly, I've been hearing so many good comments, 2 and I'm going to comment on a couple of things. So I 3 feel like we have a choice. Does Jersey City want to be a visionary? If you do then this is the way to 5 go, this is the way to lead progress, right? 6 This meeting is so important that our 7 tween girls have been downstairs cooking their own 8 dinner, eating by themselves, figuring it out because we feel so confident, and enthusiastic about this, 10 and all that it holds. So, just saying I agree with 11 the Embankment Coalition. I also want to put on the 12 record that I'm not going to repeat everything that 13 has been said, and I agree, and I stand with Sean 14 Gallagher, Austin Sakong, and Dr. Frank Gallagher, 15 all of their comments I agree with. 16 Also, Peter, the lawyer from Albanese, 17 that was very interesting what I heard from him. Му 18 one comment to him is that good intentions now 19 doesn't mean that your plans won't change, right? 20 And demolition is never okay. A forest that 21 sequesters rainwater helps our flooding issue here in 22 Jersey City.

Page 153 1 I just don't understand how that can even 2 be a consideration for a demolition. That's all I'll 3 say, thank you very much. I want other people to 4 speak. 5 MR. TABACHNICK: All right. Thanks. 6 Stephanie Daniels? 7 MS. DANIELS: Hi. MR. TABACHNICK: Hi. MS. DANIELS: Thank you much. Stephanie 10 Daniels, I live on Graham Street. I've been here 11 since 1990. I'm Vice President of the Historical 12 Paulus Hook Association, which is the neighborhood 13 association in Paulus Hook. I'm not going to go 14 through the litany of things that everyone else has 15 said, because they've been amazing comments. I think 16 the data shows the public comments from the past show 17 where this community stands, and what we would like 18 to see, what everyone here would like to see. 19 I will say this, Jersey City, unlike New 20 York City, has demolished, buried, covered, allowed 21 to be demolished, buildings and other public sites, 22 that are historic sites. The railroads are what

- built Jersey City. Harsimus Cove would not be filled
- in, Paulus Hook would not be filled in had it not
- 3 been for the railroads.
- 4 That history needs to be preserved just so
- 5 people know because people don't know anymore where
- they are, where they stand, where they live. And
- 7 this is huge. And the other thing I want to say is
- 8 that there's obviously a disconnect between what --
- 9 and I don't know his name, I apologize, the man who
- 10 spoke and said there have been lots of public
- meetings, and the city has a plan, and all of that is
- 12 good and we should be fine with that.
- We that lived here for as long as I have,
- and watched as people have made promises that they
- 15 haven't kept. So for someone to say oh well, yes,
- we're going to do something like what you told us you
- want. This has been a public process. I'm sorry,
- that's not good enough.
- So if you guys don't have the power like
- 20 you say you do, as Steve Lipsky said, and others have
- said, please do nothing. Do not abandon this thing.
- Do not allow this to be abandoned because it needs to

- turn into a park, open space, transportation, all the
- things that people have requested. A place for the
- arts, a place for health, a place for our children,
- 4 all of that. And that's how you can help.
- 5 Please do nothing if you can't. If you
- 6 can't do something, then don't allow abandonment.
- 7 Thank you very much.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Stephanie. Next
- 9 is Tom Sexton.
- MR. SEXTON: Good evening.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Hi Tom.
- MR. SEXTON: My name is Tom Sexton, and
- 13 I'm the Northeast Region Director for the Rails to
- 14 Trails Conservancy. Since I met Maureen 20 years
- 15 ago, Rails to Trails Conservancy, along with the
- 16 Jersey City and the Harsimus Coalition has been
- 17 engaged in extensive litigation and advocacy from
- 18 Conrail's illegal sale of the Harsimus Embankment to
- 19 private developers.
- However, through our combined efforts the
- courts have established the agency's jurisdiction
- 22 over the line. The difficulty we face now is that

Page 156 the STB has yet to address the consequences of this 2 sale, and the problems this creates for the STB's 3 ability to comply with Section 106. Therefore, we do not believe the MOA should be signed by any of the 5 parties. 6 Even with the many objections voiced by 7 the consulting parties, the draft MOA continues to 8 reflect incorrectly that the STB has no regulatory authority over post-abandonment uses of the Harsimus 10 Branch due to the sale of the corridor to developers. 11 As a result, the draft MOA focuses solely 12 on creating documentation of the Harsimus Branch 13 written record, and leaves it unprotected. violates the most basic requirement of Section 106, 15 which is to consider ways to avoid or mitigate 16 adverse effects, documenting this historic property 17 with a few historic signs is not a mitigation. 18 As many of the consulting parties have 19 previously pointed out, the STB has broad authority 20 to void that unlawful sale, and deny abandonment 21 requested by Conrail. The OEA's denial of their 22 authority has given Conrail and the LCCs, permission

Page 157 to treat 106 as a meaningless exercise.

- Not only does this reward Conrail for its
- ³ illegal sale, but as a national organization, we are
- 4 concerned it also encourages other railroads to
- 5 evade Section 106. Thank you for your time.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Tom, appreciate
- 7 it. Next is Kamal Shah.
- MR. SHAH: Sorry about that, let me just
- 9 start the video here. Hi, can you guys hear me?
- MR. TABACHNICK: Sure can.
- MR. SHAH: Hi. My name is Kamal Shah, and
- my family has been residing in downtown Jersey City
- 13 for the past 15 years. Last year we actually
- 14 purchased a home on 5th Street, largely in part
- because of the embankment. As others have mentioned,
- the embankment is an integral part of the
- 17 neighborhood and provides numerous benefits that
- everybody has spoken a lot more eloquently about the
- 19 environmental historical benefits than I could.
- I just wanted to give, you know, I have
- children in Jersey City. I have a 9 year old and a
- 22 12 year old, they were both born and raised in Jersey

- 1 City, and we plan on, you know, spending the next
- 2 10-15 years here at the very least. And we've spent
- 3 countless hours discussing the embankment, its
- 4 history, the importance to the City and possibly,
- 5 you know, one day looking forward to having it being
- 6 turned into a public use space.
- 7 To hear, rather abruptly, after all these
- years that it's going to be made into yet another
- 9 development in the most densely populated part of the
- 10 country is actually disappointing. My family urges
- the STB to consider the fact in the MOA.
- 12 And I did want to mention, that was pretty
- much my comment, but I did want to mention you know,
- 14 to the gentleman, I think his name is Peter Pfohl
- 15 earlier, you know, unfortunately sir, there's a
- mention a lot of developers, a lot of law firms
- working with developers have over the last 15 years
- that I've been here, made callous promises about what
- 19 they were and were not going to do, you know, to kind
- of get through the legal process.
- 21 And you know, I would say 70, 80, 90
- 22 percent of them have broken their promises, and

- 1 that's why we need, you know, the STB to be, you
- 2 know, to exercise their power and preserve the space
- ³ for the people of Jersey City. Thank you.
- 4 MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you. We'll move on
- 5 to Eugene Paolino.
- 6 MR. PAOLINO: Can you hear me?
- 7 MR. TABACHNICK: Eugene, hi.
- MR. PAOLINO: Yes, I'll be brief. Mr
- 9 Pfohl pretty much laid out much of what I would say.
- 10 I am counsel to the Albanese organization with
- 11 respect to redevelopment and land use matters.
- 12 There's two things I would just add. Community
- engagement by the community has been long-standing.
- 14 The Embankment Coalition is a
- 15 representation of multiple community groups, has been
- at the center of a long-term litigation from the very
- beginning. I think it 2005. It has submitted, as
- 18 Peter indicated, voluminous, full throated argument
- 19 and documentation to the STB, as well as to various
- 20 courts.
- 21 Certainly, the coalition and its attorneys
- 22 have often, and on many occasions, briefed this large

- 1 membership on the status of the matter before the STB
- and the City of Jersey City, and solicited their
- membership input, and that's been communicated by
- 4 them to us.
- 5 Public meetings have been held for every
- 6 planning board meeting, not only in connection with
- the recently passed 6th Street redevelopment plan.
- 8 By the way, the 6th Street redevelopment plan zones
- 9 the property from blocks two to six as a park. So
- 10 the question is to whether or not this would be a
- 11 park has been settled by that redevelopment plan.
- 12 It is subject to a settlement agreement,
- among the owners of the property, which includes the
- owners of the properties and others, including the
- 15 city and the Embankment Coalition. That settlement
- 16 agreement has been negotiated over a long period of
- 17 time.
- The important thing to know is that the
- 19 faster STB rules on this matter, the faster we will
- get to a settlement agreement, and have the park that
- everyone wants, including the owner and the
- developer. So I was saying about the number of

- ¹ public meetings There was the 6th Street public
- 2 meeting before the planning board.
- There was a similar meeting when the Louis
- 4 Minellis Moran redevelopment plan was amended 11
- 5 years ago in 2012, when that prior settlement
- 6 agreement that had been proposed ultimately failed.
- 7 Each of those planning board meetings was proceeded
- by multiple community meetings, organized either by
- 9 the city, or by the parties themselves to explain the
- 10 proposals made.
- 11 The Jersey City Municipal Council had
- similarly held multiple, well-attended public
- 13 meetings regarding changes to the Moran redevelopment
- 14 plan, and the 6th Street redevelopment plan over that
- same period of time. The STB itself has also
- scheduled multiple meetings, including the one we're
- 17 at today to explain and discuss these actions. And
- prior to this date on June 8, 2023, we had a number
- of the same community members speaking then.
- Now it's clear that the speakers all have
- heartfelt feelings about this, and I understand it.
- 22 I've been a resident of Jersey City for 30 some odd

- 1 years, and I have been born and grew up in Jersey
- 2 City, and went to school in Jersey City. There's
- been a misinformation campaign here, in which there's
- 4 been a conflation between the signing of an MOA, or
- 5 an abandonment of the railroad, with demolition or
- 6 destruction of the embankment zones. That will not
- 7 happen.
- 8 That's not anywhere in anyone's plans.
- 9 It's not permitted by any of the legislation that's
- 10 been locally passed, so that is really not the
- destruction and disaster that many speakers are
- 12 concerned about, will not happen. Doing nothing with
- 13 respect to this to the Section 106 application, and
- the abandonment application is not an option here.
- MR. TABACHNICK: I'm sorry, can you wrap
- up? Sorry, I just want to make sure we have time for
- everybody.
- MR. PAOLINO: Really, that's all I have to
- 19 say. I wanted to point out both the misinformation,
- and the fact that there has been plenty of community
- 21 meetings. Thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: All right. Thank you.

Page 163 Who's next? Donna Ristorucci, Donna? 2 MS. RISTORUCCI: Okay. Am I on? 3 MR. TABACHNICK: Hi Donna. Yeah, you're 4 on. 5 MS. RISTORUCCI: Okay. Hi. Okay. Well I 6 wasn't really going to say anything, but I've been 7 here the whole time. But I did just want to -- I 8 just think it's important to hear from, you know, the public about what we have to say about our support. 10 I totally support what everyone has said, except for 11 Peter Pfohl and the person from Albanese 12 representative here. 13 You know, I think someone had pointed out 14 at our last public meeting, or it wasn't really 15 public, that meeting with the consultation meeting 16 with these organizations. It's not the same as the 17 public. And this was the first public meeting, and I 18 think it's because before to have the more public 19 meeting. 20 Last year at the environmental fair in 21 Lincoln Park, the embankment had a table set up, and 22 we talked to many, many, many people, and nobody knew

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 m l}$ about what was going on with the embankment, and they
- 2 all signed the mailing list for the Embankment
- 3 Coalition, and fully supported developing it into a
- 4 park, a public resource and so on.
- 5 And you know, developers are relentless,
- 6 and even if we say they're not going to do this,
- 7 they're not going to do that, they're relentless.
- 8 They don't give up, and I don't think that they would
- 9 maintain no matter what the city or the public says.
- 10 They would try to develop the area.
- So anyway, I just wanted to give my
- 12 support, and that's -- I also, I'm on the Board of
- the Harsimus Cove Association too, so we are fully
- represented here. Okay, so that's really it.
- 15 Thanks all, thanks.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you, Donna. Next
- is Diane Atwell.
- MR. CROSS: Hi Diane, you're unmuted. You
- 19 can go ahead.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Your internet connection
- might be a little iffy. Okay Diane, we can't hear
- you. Do you want to log out and log back in, and

Page 165 I'll click on you when you log back in? Maybe it 2 would be a better connection. All right. Let's wait 3 until she has a better connection. Thomas Shen? MR. SHEN: Hi, yes. Can you hear me? 5 MR. TABACHNICK: That's a good connection, 6 there we go. 7 MR. SHEN: Great. Just to rebut what the 8 lawyer at Albanese had to say. You know, I believe, 9 you know, they've mentioned the developer had a deal, 10 there was a compromise to allow one portion of the 11 embankment to be built into a high-rise. But you can 12 look it up. 13 Conrail, the developer, they pulled out of 14 that deal. The city did not pull out, the Embankment 15 Coalition did not pull out. They clearly believe that 16 STB is going to be the determining factor whether 17 they can built or not, and that the local regulation 18 mentioned from Jersey City is something that they 19 will easily be able to fight. 20 If the STB allows for abandonment, the 21 developer has zero interest in following the 22 regulations the city has laid out, and this will be

- 1 litigated for probably another ten years at least,
- you know. I believe that if the STB stops this, you
- know, as the vast majority of people have asked for,
- 4 this never ending fight could finally be ended.
- 5 They also keep mentioning that they won't
- 6 destroy the stones, and just to be clear, we like the
- 7 stones, but the stones isn't stopping the flooding,
- 8 the heat, the asthma, it's not the habitat for the
- 9 wildlife. You haven't heard them say anything about
- 10 not destroying the trees or the plant life on the
- 11 embankment.
- 12 And in regards to the remedies laid out by
- the MOA, you know, the website and the plaques, and
- 14 just imagine allowing for the demolition of Central
- 15 Park to build high rises, and all the developer has
- to do is put up plaques and websites commemorating
- 17 that, you know, this is where Central Park once
- 18 stood.
- 19 You know, I think we would all say that's
- absurd. So why is it appropriate for the embankment?
- I assure people in the city, the embankment is just
- 22 as important to us as Central Park is to New

- 1 Yorkers, and the proof is in how hard we've all been
- fighting for this over the last 20 years, so thank
- you.
- 4 MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks Thomas. Let's go
- 5 to Yraida Aponte-Lipski.
- MS. APONTE-LIPSKI: Hello.
- 7 MR. TABACHNICK: Oh hi.
- MS. APONTE-LIPSKI: I'm so sorry.
- 9 MR. TABACHNICK: No problem.
- MS. APONTE-LIPSKI: Hi. I'm sorry that
- 11 I'm a little bit late. I was just in another
- meeting. And I'm going to be very straightforward
- just to say I just ask that the abandonment be
- denied, and your Board take no action. And I will
- 15 put this in writing on my letterhead.
- I don't want to take your time because I
- 17 know everybody already is talking, and what they were
- saying is what we all feel about the embankment, so
- 19 that's all I have to say. Thank you for your time.
- 20 I agree with everything.
- MR. TABACHNICK: All right. Thank you.
- Joey O'Rourke?

Page 168 MS. O'ROURKE: Hi. I'm a 14 year resident 2 of Jersey City, and I'd like to start by echoing the 3 overwhelming majority of the comments made this 4 evening pertaining to the importance of the 5 embankment to the community, the fact that the draft 6 MOA fails to adequately protect this invaluable 7 asset, and that if the STB moves forward in 8 permitting abandonment, it will not only do a great disservice to this region, but also set a horrendous 10 national precedent. 11 I would like to point out again, as others 12 have, that the majority of the commenters concern is 13 not only with the preservation of the walls and the 14 stones of the embankment, but also of the forest 15 above. Even if there is a promise not to demolish 16 the embankment walls or stones, and if that promise 17 is kept, as Peter and Eugene have indicated, that's 18 not sufficient. 19 The forest currently provides flood 20 mitigation, air quality improvement, and wildlife 21 sanctuary that are all beneficial, immensely 22 beneficial to this community with the potential to

- 1 provide even more benefits if it becomes a useable
- green space for the public. The forest must be also
- 3 protected.
- As others have urged, I too will urge the
- 5 STB to deny abandonment, and instead do nothing if
- 6 they are truly unable to do more to protect the
- 7 embankment. Thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Thanks very much. Elvin
- 9 Dominici?
- MR. DOMINICI: Hello? Can you hear me?
- MR. TABACHNICK: I hear you fine.
- MR. DOMINICI: All right. Good evening,
- my name is Elvin Dominici, I'm a life resident of
- this wonderful city. And it's very powerful to see
- so many residents, organizations, and community
- overall coming together with the same idea. We want
- to make sure that we protect the embankment.
- It is sad to see that, you know, part of
- 19 the people that were working with the development
- 20 saying that they hosted many community meetings, and
- 21 from what I'm seeing, and what is the feeling in this
- 22 actual meeting is that real community of Jersey City

- were not there.
- I'm trying to make sure that this natural
- habitat is protected. There are many reasons why
- 4 there was a list of why we should protect it, and why
- 5 it's important to our community. And it's now up to
- 6 the Board to listen to those voices to make sure
- 7 that they do what is right because the legacy and the
- 8 impact that we would have with this, is many Jersey
- 9 City families and residents.
- So, I urge you as many others before me,
- to take into consideration to do what's right, and
- 12 protect the embankment and provide to this community
- what they assert, as we all know, Jersey City for the
- last 10 years is being taken away by the increase of
- developers, -- and affordability, and it's good to
- see that the community is coming together to make
- 17 sure this time, this time the will and the sound of
- the community is actually embraced and done for
- 19 saving the embankment. Thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Okay. Thanks very much.
- 21 Kaya Stein? Hi.
- MS. STEIN: My name is Kaya Stein. I am 9

- 1 years old, and I'm in fourth grade. Please protect
- the embankment. I think one day I would like to
- yisit the top of the wall to see the birds fly and live
- 4 in the trees. I see the embankment every day on the
- 5 way to dance school, and when I play in the park.
- 6 Please protect Jersey's City's embankment.
- 7 Thank you.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Great job Kaya. Thank
- 9 you very much. And I'll go back to Diane Atwell.
- MS. ATWELL: Hi. Can you hear me?
- MR. TABACHNICK: Yeah. I hear you fine
- $12 \quad \text{now.}$
- MS. ATWELL: Okay. I'm going to leave off
- 14 my video in the hopes that I can be heard. My name
- 15 is Diane Atwell. The Vice President of the Hamilton
- 16 Park Neighborhood Association. I appreciate you
- 17 allowing me to speak. I just want to respond to the
- 18 two gentlemen who said that they're (internet
- interference). I think that this whole process is
- 20 because Conrail sold their property. And these
- gentlemen shouldn't even be here because they are
- 22 proposing, they are part of the process, that this --

- if there was some support then why (internet
- interference), from the Department of Infrastructure,
- 3 and all the other departments from the city that
- 4 spoke out about this process.
- 5 The STB has to do the right thing, and in
- 6 the public interest, and not proceeding with this
- 7 (internet interference). That's all I have to say,
- 8 thank you.
- 9 MR. RAYMOND: Can you hear me?
- MR. TABACHNICK: Yeah, hi William. Go
- 11 right ahead.
- MR. RAYMOND: All right. My name is
- William Raymond. I moved to Jersey City 19 years
- 14 ago, spent a third of that time living in Harsimus
- 15 Cove, right near the embankment. I'm not a
- 16 homeowner in the Heights, and I -- what can I say
- 17 that hasn't been said already.
- I want to bring one point to your
- 19 attention. When someone says we'll preserve the
- walls, I will direct your attention to 10th Street
- and the horrible cost to the community that happened
- there, but those walls still stand. So, don't be

- discouraged by words like that. You know, stay
- 2 standing, and I would ask that the STB will abide by
- the wishes of the residents, and the best interests
- 4 of the residents.
- I mean you are here for our protection,
- 6 that is your main goal. And the huge outpouring of
- ⁷ support tonight has been very encouraging, and I just
- 8 hope that you respect that. Thank you very much.
- 9 MR. TABACHNICK: All right. Thank you.
- 10 Thank you William. Does anybody else who's attending
- the meeting right now want to speak who hasn't spoken
- 12 yet? Raise your hand. Okay. Well I guess I'll
- 13 conclude the --
- MR. CROSS: Hey Alan, Carl just raised his
- 15 hand.
- MR. TABACHNICK: Oh, you just made it
- 17 Carl. Go ahead Carl.
- MR. JOHANSSON: Okay. I'm Carl Johansson.
- 19 I live in Jersey City. I am in the area of the
- downtown Jersey City, but not directly next to the
- embankment. And I would like to say that I agree
- with the previous speakers that have talked about the

Page 174 need to protect the embankment. 2 And I cannot speak as elegantly as the 3 previous speakers, but what I can say is that the embankment has existed in some shape or form since 5 the late 1800's, mid to late 1800's. And these 6 railroads that ran across the embankment, they served 7 Jersey City and New York City eastbound. And they also served the rest of the 9 country eastwards, and they are an integral part of 10 the history of Jersey City, and also of the country 11 as a whole. The embankment is also nestled between 12 nationally recognized historic district. To 13 jeopardize this important structure by not protecting it with language to prevent degradation, or 15 destruction, or building upon it is unfathomable. 16 I urge the STB to use its authority to 17 properly and properly include language that protects 18 the structure, its history as requested by the public 19 whose interest you're meant to protect. Thank you 20 very much for this meeting. 21 MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you Carl. 22 Tider?

Page 175 1 I'm Diane MS. TIDER: Hi, yes, thank you. 2 Tider. I have been a Jersey City -- can you hear me? 3 MR. TABACHNICK: Yeah, I hear you fine. MS. TIDER: Can you hear me? MR. TABACHNICK: Yeah. 6 MS. TIDER: Okay. Thanks. I have been a 7 Jersey City resident for about 15 years, and 8 homeowner here in downtown Jersey City. And I just want to echo what so many of my fellow citizens here 10 have spoken about, asking state and federal agencies, 11 the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office, 12 the Federal Advisory Council on Historic 13 Preservation, and the STB that really exist to serve 14 the public interest, not to sign a memorandum of 15 agreement that does nothing to mitigate adverse 16 effects to the Harsimus Branch and other historic 17 properties. 18 STB will actively contribute to resource 19 harm if it permits abandonment without preservation 20 conditions. And yeah, just as so many others have 21 said, it will really legitimize a backwards strategy 22 that the rail companies have taken, and really abuse

- the historic properties and citizens that we're
- 2 asking you to protect and to preserve this wonderful
- 3 resource. Thank you.
- 4 MR. TABACHNICK: Thank you. All right.
- Not seeing any more comments Matt, is there anyone
- 6 else I am missing?
- 7 MR. CROSS: No. That is it.
- 8 MR. TABACHNICK: All right. Great. I'm
- 9 trying to turn on my camera. Not that you want to
- 10 see me, but here I am, so. All right. Next slide,
- 11 Adam please. So I really appreciate everybody's time
- 12 and participation, and heart, and input, and your
- thoughtful comments tonight.
- And so, we're going to review it, review
- 15 everything, and I appreciate everyone taking their
- time, and it's a long time to stay on the phone, not
- 17 phone, on the computer, but it's a long time to stay
- in a meeting, but it just shows how much you care
- 19 about the area, and I really appreciate that.
- I wanted to briefly wrap up our meeting
- 21 and talk about next steps in the process. As we
- mentioned, this meeting is being recorded and

- 1 transcribed. And we'll post the transcript on our
- website shortly after the meeting at www.stb.gov.
- And remember, if you didn't provide input
- 4 during the meeting, or if you did speak, but want to
- 5 provide additional comments, that you can email them
- 6 to me directly, or you can submit them to our online
- 7 system because we are interested in hearing from as
- 8 many folks as possible on this important case.
- 9 Let me briefly walk you through now how to
- 10 hand in your comments in our system. Next slide
- 11 please. And you'll be able to share, you know, we
- will be posting this presentation too publicly on our
- website, so it will be available for anybody. And
- these instructions that are here about how to enter
- 15 comments into our system will be on the PowerPoint,
- 16 and you can share that with anybody else who wants to
- 17 enter comments.
- 18 As I noted before, OEA encourages
- 19 interested parties and the public to submit their
- 20 comments on this case electronically through our
- website. This is a shot of the website. To get to
- 22 the place to submit the comments, on the home page

- 1 you selected file environmental comment, which is on
- the right side below the need assistance button.
- 3 Clicking on this will take you to the
- 4 comment page. Next slide please. This slide shows
- 5 the comment form on our website, where you can type
- 6 your comments directly into the form. Longer
- 7 comments and documents could also be attached to the
- 8 form, as Word, Adobe Acrobat, or another format that
- 9 you might have.
- 10 Of course you can also submit comments
- directly to me via email. My contact information
- will be at the end. That's Alan. Tabachnick,
- 13 T-A-B-A-C-H-N-I-C-K @stb.gov. You can also send in
- 14 written comments, mailing them to my attention at the
- Surface Transportation Board 395 E Street, Southwest,
- Washington, D.C. 20423, and attention environmental
- 17 filing, and please put the docket number on your
- 18 letter.
- 19 And the docket number is AB167 Sub Number
- 20 1189X. Again, let's see. And then you can also call
- me, which my contact will be on the last slide. You
- 22 can call me at 202-245-0367 for additional, you know,

- 1 questions. Next slide please.
- 2 As you can see we're very interested in
- 3 hearing from everyone, and have provided a wide range
- of options for you to share your comments and input.
- 5 I want to briefly wrap up our meeting today and talk
- 6 about the next steps in the process. As we
- mentioned, the meeting is being recorded and
- 8 transcribed, and the transcript will be posted on the
- 9 website.
- 10 Following this meeting, OEA will review
- all the comments received, both during the meeting,
- 12 and those submitted after the meeting. And we will
- issue a final MOA for signature by the required
- 14 parties. Once executed, the final MOA will also be
- posted publicly on our website.
- And once the MOA has been executed, the
- 17 Board can move forward with its decision on the
- 18 proposed Harsimus Branch Abandonment. Again, this
- 19 will take some time, and we will be reviewing the
- transcript, and all of your comments as they come in,
- and we will be continuing the consultation process.
- 22 Next slide please.

Harsimus Branch Abandonment Section 106 Public Meeting September 28, 2023

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1	We thank you again for your participation.
2	I really appreciate it, as we all do. And your
3	participation in the 106 process as we're attending
4	this important Section 106 public meeting for the
5	proposed Harsimus Branch Abandonment. Again, if you
6	have any questions about the case, or how to enter
7	comments into our online system, please contact me.
8	I've included our contact information on
9	this slide. So, I want to thank everybody for
10	participating, sharing your time and your input, and
11	your heart during this meeting. I really appreciate
12	it. Thanks very much everybody, and have a great
13	rest of your evening.
14	(Whereupon the Meeting for the Harsimus
15	Branch Abandonment Section 106 Public Meeting
16	concluded at 8:49 p.m.)
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