

From: Fhala, Ben (RIOCI) Ben.Fhala@rioc.ny.gov
Subject: Resignation from the RIOCI Board of Directors - Ben Fhala - Effective Immediately
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To: Olszewska, Marta (RIOCI) Marta.Olszewska@rioc.ny.gov, flagg@nysenate.gov, lkrueger@nysenate.gov, tannen@nysenate.gov, seawrir@assembly.state.ny.us, ferrisseyc@assembly.state.ny.us, Hannah.Weinerman@mail.house.gov, daniel.rubin@mail.house.gov, info@manhattanbp.nyc.gov, ElaineCheung@manhattanbp.nyc.gov, tshimamura@manhattanbp.nyc.gov, MMackey@manhattanbp.nyc.gov, ecuello@manhattanbp.nyc.gov, press@manhattanbp.nyc.gov, roosevelt.nycc@gmail.com, ACorrea@council.nyc.gov, Szott, Jonathan jszott@council.nyc.gov, district5@council.nyc.gov District5@council.nyc.gov, JaGarcia@council.nyc.gov, Gdamalas.nys@gmail.com, SeawrightR@nyassembly.gov, minna.elias@mail.house.gov, Anderson, Meghan (HCR) Meghan.Anderson@hcr.ny.gov, Visnauskas, RuthAnne (HCR) ruthanne.visnauskas@hcr.ny.gov
Cc: Amin, Dhruvika (RIOCI) Dhruvika.Amin@rioc.ny.gov, McCabe, Meg (RIOCI) Meg.McCabe@rioc.ny.gov, Cunneen, Mary (RIOCI) Mary.Cunneen@rioc.ny.gov, Daniels, Bryant (RIOCI) Bryant.Daniels@rioc.ny.gov, Morales, Aida (RIOCI) Aida.Morales@rioc.ny.gov, Stasko, Lada (RIOCI) Lada.Stasko@rioc.ny.gov, Bedasie, Govind (RIOCI) Govind.Bedasie@rioc.ny.gov, DAVID STONE davidstone@me.com, rooseveltislander@gmail.com, rioc.dl.Board-of-Directors RIOCIBoard@rioc.ny.gov, margiesmi@gmail.com, RIOCI Press riocpress@RIOCI.ny.gov, Staff RIOCIAdministrativeStaff@rioc.ny.gov

Dear Governor Hochul,

I am writing to formally submit my resignation as a member of the Board of Directors of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOCI), effective immediately. It is my sincere hope that this decision might also help to motivate board members whose terms have long expired to consider stepping down to pave the way for others to step up and lead with the commitment, energy and vision required to address the many challenges ahead.

For the past year, working alongside dedicated individuals, together we advocated for and advised implementation of policies that benefit the Roosevelt Island community. Among these achievements:

- **Revised Updated Bylaws:** Governance Committee updated the bylaws aimed at engagement, transparency and setting the stage for a more localized governance and decision-making process. The revised Bylaws received the approval of the ABO and the COOG and are ready for the consideration of the full board.
- **Addressing Negligence/Deferred Maintenance in Repair of Pavement and Zebra Block Maintenance:** Initiating the repairs has already led to a dramatic reduction in slip-and-fall incidents, directly improving public safety and accessibility of our Island. Safer streets reduce accidents and lawsuits.
- **Empowering Island Leadership to Engage with Stakeholders:** Facilitating deeper engagement between Island leadership and stakeholders, including local media, to enhance transparency and community engagement in decision-making processes.
- **Increased Public Funding for Local Non-Profits:** Successfully aligned public purpose funding with the needs of local non-profits, ensuring that resources are distributed more effectively to directly support community-driven initiatives.
- **Reducing Motorgate Waitlist:** from a waitlist of well over a year to immediate availability for all residents, significantly improving access and increasing revenue for the corporation.

Despite these accomplishments, many critical issues still require urgent attention to ensure the continued growth and well-being of the Roosevelt Island community. These include:

- **Corruption and Misconduct in Contract Selection:** Numerous allegations of corruption, favoritism, and misconduct in the selection of RIOC contracts, contractors and consultants seems to be substantiated. This issue requires urgent investigation and reform to restore trust and integrity.
- **Unjustified Salary Increases for Senior Staff while lacking Critical Skills required for performance tasks :** Salaries within RIOC's senior staff have ballooned over the years without clear guidelines regarding the professional responsibilities, success parameters, or alignment with current market rates for comparable government positions. Multiple whistleblowers have reported unmerited salary increases, but no action has been taken by the board or its handlers. At the same time, critical skilled roles such as a structural engineer remain unfilled. The lack of a professional staff with appropriate qualifications results in the hiring of outside consultants at significant additional expense.
- **Enabling Strong, Experienced Local Leadership:** With de facto vacancies in our CEO, COO and General Counsel roles, it's critical to appoint qualified and capable leadership that serves the public interests of Roosevelt Island. Meanwhile, the continued payment for the current at-home administration adds a strain on resources.
- **Self-Funded Investigations:** The ongoing practice of self-funded, open-ended investigations has cost Island residents millions of dollars over the years. Often they are without clear guardrails, control mechanisms, or transparency. These investigations need to be scrutinized and brought under board oversight.
- **Neglect and Disrepair of Island Infrastructure:** Years of deferred maintenance and negligence have left many structures on the island in disrepair, from a sinking Main Street to structurally compromised railings to unresolved issues with steam tunnels that could pose catastrophic risks. Immediate action is needed to prevent further deterioration and ensure public safety. The current bus crisis is evidence that advanced organization and budget planning is critical but is rarely, if ever, done. Preventive maintenance of all systems and operations should be done on a routine basis.
- **Capitalization of Tram Tourism Ridership:** The current focus on subsidizing tram ridership for tourists is negatively impacting the quality of service and strains public resources. The increase in tourism should provide an injection of revenue to increase the quality of life of all stakeholders on the Island but no strategic vision has been discussed let alone implemented.
- **Finding New Funding Avenues:** It is crucial to explore new ways to fund RIOC initiatives, such as building out a grants department or hiring an advocacy group to secure long-term operational funding and consider tourism as a source for economic growth.

However, it has become increasingly clear that I have become a focal point of discussions and controversies that detract from the essential work that needs to be done. The focus and efforts should always be on the real and critical issues the Island faces. The work of

RIOC and its board, as a public benefit corporation, should be exclusively to improve the quality of life for the stakeholders of this Island—the residents, businesses, and communities we serve. In light of this, I believe that my continued presence on the board is counterproductive to achieving the progress the stakeholders of this Island deserve.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the people of Roosevelt Island. I remain deeply committed to the community and will continue to support it in any way I can.

Cordially,

Ben Fhala*
Junior (Resident) Board Member

*Disclaimer: All statements made by Ben Fhala are made in his capacity as a RIOC Resident Board member. He does not represent the entirety of RIOC or the full board but serves as a Resident Board member, offering information to the community and its stakeholders.