

January 12, 2008

## No to jailhouse school

It almost sounded like a joke: At a meeting last week, the city's Corrections Commissioner Martin Horn announced that he's had so much trouble finding commercial tenants for the ground-floor retail annex at the Brooklyn House of Detention that he's considering putting a middle school in the two-story space.

But it was no joke. And, according to several people who were at the meeting, Councilman David Yassky (D-Brooklyn Heights) supported Horn's laughable idea.

Putting a middle school at the jail site is as bad an idea that has bubbled up from the bureaucracy in years. Not only does it treat already struggling public school parents with contempt, but it sends a poor symbolic message to students — that the government treats education and incarceration as the same thing (merely the age of the inmates is different).

Yassky has been calling for a new middle school to serve Brooklyn Heights, Downtown and the growing neighborhood of DUMBO — but his support for a middle school in the jail is wrongheaded and, frankly, petulant.

Yassky, you see, staunchly opposes DUMBO developer David Walentas's plan to build an 18-story apartment building — which would include a middle school, free of charge to the city — along Dock Street. His opposition is based, he says, because part of the building would block some views of the Brooklyn Bridge — though he downplays the fact that most of the lost views would be from apartments whose owners were told when they purchased the units that they would lose their postcard-perfect look at the bridge (see Walentas's renderings at [www.dockstreetdumbo.com](http://www.dockstreetdumbo.com)).

There was some merit to Yassky's objections three years ago to an earlier version of Walentas's plan. That incarnation was bulkier and blocked far more views of the Brooklyn Bridge. As a result of public outcry and Yassky's opposition, the plan failed.

But now, Walentas has returned with a far better project.

By acquiring additional land, the 18-story wing of the building is set further back from the fabled bridge. Also, he has made a commitment to environmentally friendly construction and has set aside 20 percent of the rental units at below-market rates.

And he's including that middle school.

If Yassky still wants to oppose the Dock Street project, that's his prerogative. But if he thinks a jail is a better place for a new middle school than in the first two floors of a David Walentas building in DUMBO, he needs to re-educate himself on the true needs of his constituents.