

Battery Park City Is Privatizing Jobs Held By 45 Parks Officers

By DAN ROSENBLUM | Posted: Monday, November 16, 2015 5:45 pm

Up to 45 Parks Enforcement Patrol Officers working in Battery Park City will be replaced by private-security contractors, following a vote by the quasi-governmental authority that manages the 92-acre development, a move that was sharply criticized by the employees' union.

The Battery Park City Authority, which spends about \$2.5 million each year to fund the dedicated PEP Officers, said during an Oct. 27 board meeting and in a subsequent presentation to the community board that it would hire AlliedBarton. The \$2.1-million, three-year contract will include foot and bicycle patrols that extend outside of the parks and into the surrounding neighborhood. The uniforms will be “bright, bright fluorescent blinding yellow” a BPCA official said during the most-recent board meeting.

Union: Who Makes Arrests?

The move came as a shock to some people, including District Council 37 Local 983 President Joe Puleo, who represents the Parks Department's PEP Officers, who have been stationed in the park since 1992. He said he was baffled by the switch and questioned how the guards could replace the officers who are authorized to issue tickets and make arrests. “How could you replace people that can do all these functions, and then rely on a security company who has no more rights than an average individual to take their place?” he said.

The guards—dubbed “ambassadors”—will work in tandem with some PEP Officers. But Mr. Puleo feared a “skeleton crew” of remaining officers could be stretched too thin to respond to serious situations.

“If they get into a complication and now they call for our assistance, and there's only one person



Puleo_Joseph

JOE PULEO: Change ‘won’t work in outside setting.’

to address something that would need more people, this could put our officers in harm's way," he said.

Mr. Puleo said the ambassadors' jobs would involve welcoming visitors to the area and escorting residents to their homes, describing their functions as "all of the things that would probably work in a department store, but not in an outside setting."

Privately-Funded Jobs

There are approximately 241 city-funded PEP officers spread across the five boroughs. Additional dedicated officers, such as those in Battery Park City, are funded through an arrangement with conservancies and organizations that manage a dozen recreational spaces such as Brooklyn Bridge Park and Central Park.

Mr. Puleo said though the BPCA voted to approve the contract, it would wait until Dec. 16 to sign it. He said people living in the neighborhood also questioned the transparency of the agency. "It seems like these people are taking control over workers and residents of this particular community," he said.

BPCA spokeswoman Robin Forst said the company was awarded the contract after a competitive request for proposals. "The authority believes that the enhanced security presence created by leveraging the competencies of PEP and AlliedBarton would benefit the entire community in many ways," she said. "There will be bicycle and foot patrols in areas of Battery Park City beyond our 35 acres of parks including the Eastern Boundary which recently came under our auspices. AlliedBarton's Ambassadors will have hand-held devices as part of their equipment to track complaints and incidents electronically with geocoding equipment for even greater location accuracy. This will allow for rapid electronic notification of any issues to all involved in keeping Battery Park City safe."

Parks: Won't Be Layoffs

A Parks Department spokesperson said officers wouldn't be laid off but would be redeployed to other places, including The Battery at the southern tip of Manhattan. But Mr. Puleo said it was unclear whether the city would fill in the \$2.5 million the BPCA has spent annually to pay for the dedicated workers. "That means we're still going to get a reduction in that amount," he said.

The hourly pay for the position is \$12.50 to \$18.50, according to a Craigslist job-posting for security officers at Battery Park and two other locations in the city.

AlliedBarton has more than 60,000 employees and thousands of clients, according to its website. Last year, the Pennsylvania-based company agreed to pay the city \$1.3 million after settling with the Comptroller's Office for not following prevailing-wage laws for nearly 150 security guards for

the NYC Transit Authority.

The BPCA is a quasi-governmental organization created in the 1960s to govern then-deteriorating piers which have since been developed into a planned community consisting mostly of residential high rises. It gives the city payments in lieu of taxes and a share of its annual surplus, but State Sen. Daniel Squadron has called for the city to take more control over the authority, whose board is appointed by Governor Cuomo.

Local 983 sued the Parks Department and the BPCA in 2011 over illegal racial bias against seven black PEP Officers who were replaced with white and Asian officers, prompting a \$165,000 settlement two years later.