The Property Rights Foundation of America, Inc., presented its 2016 Freedom Award to New York State Senator Tony Avella on Monday, May 2, 2016 at the senator’s district office in Bayside, Queens.

The award was in honor of the senator’s continuing leadership of the multi-party lawsuit, Sen. Tony Avella, et al. vs. The City of New York, et al., to effectively protect the communities and industries in the wide area around Citi Field stadium in Corona from high-rise commercial development—the 1.4 million square foot “Willets West” mega-mail that would eliminate extensive parkland.

In making the presentation, Carol W. LaGrasse, president of the Stony Creek, N.Y.-based property rights organization, said that the award recognizes of the senator’s unwavering defense of the fundamental rights of the people conducting the many essential businesses in Willets Point, as well as a single life-long resident and many property owners.

Senator Avella said that he was happy to work with business owners and people who care about individual rights, according to the Queens Ledger writer Benjamin Fang, one of several reporters who crowded the district office: http://www.queensledger.com/view/full_story/27173543/article-Avella-receives-award-from-Property-Rights-Foundation?

Ms. LaGrasse pointed out that the completion of the mega-mall planned by developers would wipe out much of Willets Point’s unique industrial community to pave it over for relocated parking for Citi Field stadium. Furthermore, she said, the mega-mall would instigate the radical gentrification of the adjacent community of Corona, driving out the long-standing, close-knit circle of local people and Mom and Pop businesses.

“All the other elected officials just seemed to fall by the wayside, and there was Senator Tony Avella, standing up for the people of Willets Point, for the people of Corona, for the people of Flushing and Bayside, because this affects this whole area,” said Carol LaGrasse, according to staff writer Lynn Edmonds in the May 12 Queens Tribune.

“You just can’t take parkland and make it into a mega-mall,” Ms. LaGrasse said, according to Benjamin Fang’s article “Avella honored for Willets fight” in the May 5 Queens Examiner newspaper. “You can’t betray the public trust with such a fundamental part of government.”

The Queens Examiner also reported that Avella and his supporters, who had earlier fought successfully against the city’s use of eminent domain, “won unanimously at the Appellate Division, which led to the city dropping out of the suit.” However, Queens Development Group, Related Companies and Sterling Equities have appealed the appellate court’s decision, even though the City of New York dropped out.

The Property Rights Foundation of America filed an amicus brief in December 2011 in support of the Willets Pointers’ lawsuit that successfully challenged New York City’s imposition of eminent domain. At the May 2 award presentation, Ms. LaGrasse said, “The way you treat small, thriving communities, which are the heart of New York City, shows the real motivation of the city government at that time.”

“Willets Point is a perfect example of, ‘Let’s take somebody’s piece of property, not for a highway, not for a hospital, not for a school,’” Senator Avella said, according to Medina Toure’s Times Ledger print article.

“Let’s take it so we can give it to a billion-dollar developer. That to me is so undemocratic and so un-American and I’d be happy to work with them and continue this fight,” Ms. Toure quoted the senator.

The battle against New York City’s eminent domain and urban redevelopment at Willets Point has been a topic at the Property Rights Foundation’s annual national conferences every year beginning in 2010: http://prfamerica.org/indices/WilletsPoint-Index.html