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WEST VILLAGE

At a Pier to Be Redone, Gay Youth Seek a Haven

By JOSEPH HUFF-HANNON

STANDING in front of a banquet hall in Greenwich Village packed with more than 100 young people on Monday evening, Glo Ross tailored her pitch to the audience.

“So we all just went on a date with the Hudson River Park Trust,” said Ms. Ross, who is an organizer with Fierce, a group of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender minority youths. “But you know, we’re a little fed up.”

The response was wild applause and hooting from the overflow crowd in the gallery, where white columns were wrapped with pink ribbons.

The trust oversees the planning, construction and operation of Hudson River Park and all the piers that run from Battery Park to 59th Street. Members of Fierce are particularly concerned about Pier 40, a massive but dilapidated structure that juts into the Hudson River where West Houston Street meets the West Side Highway.

Since the pier sits just south of Pier 45 at Christopher Street, long a gathering spot for youths like the members of Fierce, many of them say that the trust hasn’t always paid them much mind in the deliberations about what kind of redevelopment plans are appropriate for the pier.

Fierce and the Urban Justice Center, a public-interest legal group, are asking that any plan include a 24-hour youth center. Such a center, they hope, would offer services like job training, transitional housing, recreation and safe space.

“The pier is just the place to be, to hang out and be who you are,” said Tiffany Browne, an 18-year-old budding photographer from Brownsville, Brooklyn, who arrived with a big camera swinging from her neck. “I spent all last summer down there.”

As Ms. Browne darted off to snap some photos, a 24-year-old who calls himself Mango chimed in with a similar story.

“Where I’m from in Harlem, you don’t hear too much about L.G.B.T. issues,” he said. “Down here, it’s our only place to hang out, to relax.”

Members of Fierce acknowledge that a youth center won’t be an easy sell, especially in the current economic climate; last year, \$5 million was cut from the budgets of organizations like Fierce. But since the trust may be eligible for federal stimulus money, advocates for the young people hope that their voices will be heard when it comes to development.

But the trust has considered previous proposals that included a youth center and has ruled that they would not work, primarily for financial reasons. Officials at the trust would not comment on their larger development plans, but they did say that any stimulus money would likely be directed to basic repairs at Pier 40.

“There are a bunch of pilings that need to be replaced,” said Lee Silberstein, a spokesman for the trust. “The first order of business is really to make sure the pier doesn’t collapse.”