



The City of New York

Manhattan Community Board 1

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City Planning Commission

Public Hearing on the City's Proposed East Midtown Rezoning Plan

Testimony by Michael Levine, Consulting Planner

Manhattan Community Board 1

Wednesday, August 7, 2013

Museum of the American Indian

10:00 am

I am Michael Levine, Consulting Planner for Manhattan Community Board One (CB1). Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this application for the proposed East Midtown Rezoning.

The proposed plan for rezoning the East Midtown area around the Grand Central District would increase the maximum allowable Floor Area and create incentives for new development in East Midtown. This proposed rezoning would result in a projected increment of approximately 4.4 million square feet of space in the next 20 years, and it is this net increase that drives most of the negative impacts of the proposed rezoning including increased load on public transit and overcrowded streets and sidewalks.

We believe the current proposed plan would also impose undue hardship on Lower Manhattan. On September 11, 2001, 14 million square feet of commercial office space in Lower Manhattan was destroyed, 65,000 jobs were lost or relocated, and more than 20,000 residents were displaced. Now, almost twelve years later, Lower Manhattan is in the middle of a renaissance as more residents and businesses have come to the area than were lost. By 2012 Lower Manhattan had 8,484 companies, 186 more than were here on 9/11. Employment is on an upward trend with a current total of 309,500 employees.

CB1 wants to make sure that this positive momentum continues. Steady progress has been made as construction continues on 10 million square feet of world class, LEED certified office space, including almost 500,000 square feet of retail space. The 105-story 2.6 million square foot World Trade Center Tower 1 is approximately 55 percent leased and is expected to open in the first quarter of 2014. The 72-story 2.3 million-square-foot World Trade Center Tower 4 is 50 percent leased and will also open in first quarter of 2014.

The proposed East Midtown Rezoning contains a "sunrise" provision under which building permits could not be issued until July 1, 2017. But, the final build-out of the World Trade Center site will extend beyond 2019, according to the World Trade Center Campus Security Plan Draft Environmental Impact Statement released on April 8, 2013.

While CB1 supports the concept that zoning changes may be necessary to permit the commercial office space in East Midtown to be upgraded and maintained as 21st Century Class A commercial space, CB1 believes that a 4.4 million square foot net increase in commercial office space in the East Midtown area would place an unsustainable burden on the transportation infrastructure that serves not only East Midtown, but Lower Manhattan as well.

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We thank mayor Bloomberg for his announcement about transit improvements but we need further clarification. We believe that the City of New York and the MTA should continue to work on resolving subway capacity issues in advance of the East Midtown zoning change in order to accommodate the expected increase in ridership.

Further, CB1 strongly urges the City Planning Commission to conduct a comprehensive review of how the proposed East Midtown Rezoning would affect Lower Manhattan, with a particular emphasis on the extent to which rezoning Midtown would adversely impact the ongoing redevelopment of Lower Manhattan.

Finally, CB1 strongly urges that the sunrise provision of the proposed East Midtown Rezoning be extended to a later date on which certain meaningful World Trade Center site development milestones could be accomplished, such as completion of a fixed number of buildings and square feet of space completed and leased, before the proposed rezoning is adopted.

Copies of the CB1 resolution on the East Midtown Rezoning adopted on May 28, 2013 are attached to this testimony.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.