



CITY PLANNING COMMISSION  
CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE CHAIR

June 7, 2006

Honorable Charles Gargano, Chairman  
Empire State Development Corporation  
633 Third Avenue, 37<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10017

Re: Comments on the General Project Plan for the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center Expansion and Renovation Civic Project and Land use Improvement Project

Dear Chairman Gargano:

The City Planning Commission (the "Commission") has reviewed the General Project Plan (the "GPP") for the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center Expansion and Renovation Civic Project and Land Use Improvement Project (the "Project"), dated April 5, 2006. The Commission believes that adoption of the GPP will be an important milestone in the redevelopment of the West Side, and that the project has the potential to catalyze redevelopment of the entire Hudson Yards area. The Commission therefore recommends approval of the GPP and looks forward to continued cooperation with ESDC and CCDC on design and planning elements of the Project as it progresses to final design.

The GPP is subject to Commission review pursuant to the provisions of Subdivision 3 of Section 16 of the New York State Urban Development Corporation Act which provide that a planning board or commission may recommend approval, disapproval or modification of a general project plan whenever such plan requires the override of local law or regulation for implementation, or in the case of a project where the Empire State Development Corporation or a subsidiary intends to acquire real property by eminent domain.

In this case, the Project includes the override of local law and regulation as well as the acquisition of real property with regard to: (i) acquisition of a City owned parcel on Eleventh Avenue at West 40<sup>th</sup> Street; (ii) local zoning requirements that apply to the block bounded by West 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, Eleventh Avenue, West 34<sup>th</sup> Street, and Twelfth Avenue; (iii) acquisition of a City owned parcel along the future Hudson Boulevard between West 35<sup>th</sup> Street and West 36<sup>th</sup> Street; and (iv) Sections 93-42 and 93-50 of the New York City Zoning Resolution regarding tower height and setbacks and the "E" designations that apply to the block bounded by West 35<sup>th</sup> Street, Hudson Boulevard, West 36<sup>th</sup> Street, and Eleventh Avenue.

The goal of the Project is to develop a first class convention center and hotel that will increase New York City's competitive position in the convention and trade show industry. The expansion and renovation of the Javits Center would add approximately 340,000 square feet of new

exhibition space, including a ballroom, 180,000 square feet of meeting space, a new truck marshalling facility, and a significant increase in pre-function and back-of-house space.

The plans for the Javits Center also include creating a new front door along Eleventh Avenue by eliminating the vehicle access “moat”, creating a new building façade and public space, and reorganizing vehicular loading and unloading. The hotel site at Eleventh Avenue between West 35<sup>th</sup> and West 36<sup>th</sup> Streets would be developed with a much needed 1,000 to 1,500 room convention hotel with ballroom space and meeting rooms. To facilitate the program for the Javits Center and Hotel, the block between West 33<sup>rd</sup> and West 34<sup>th</sup> Streets and Eleventh and Twelfth Avenues would be developed with 2.45 million gross square feet of residential and commercial uses and 1.25 acres of open space. The Javits Center, Hotel, and mixed-use development would combine to form part of the comprehensive, transit oriented, land use plan for Hudson Yards to transform the far west midtown area of Manhattan.

The Commission commends the Convention Center Development Corporation and its design team for a concept level design which addresses significant shortcomings in the prior Javits Center design, including the “black box” identity, deadening Eleventh Avenue frontage, and lack of a comprehensive marshalling plan. The current plans, as described in the GPP, indicate that a new building façade along Eleventh Avenue, open spaces along Eleventh Avenue and West 34<sup>th</sup> Street, and a marshalling facility between West 39<sup>th</sup> and West 40<sup>th</sup> Streets would be provided as part of the Project.

The Commission is pleased that the ESDC and the CCDC have consulted with the Department of City Planning during the concept design development of the new facility and commends the design team for the attention given to ensuring that this new facility will enhance the future urban fabric of the Hudson Yards area. As the concept design moves forward in the design development process, the Commission encourages the design team and the CCDC to continue to consider and address the following:

### **Javits Center**

- **Edges and Façades**

The design concept addresses significant deficiencies in the current Convention Center’s presence on Eleventh Avenue. Improvements for both West 40<sup>th</sup> Street and West 34<sup>th</sup> Street, which will become the two main gateways to the River, should be further developed, with particular attention to ensuring that sidewalk widths can accommodate pedestrians and that facades are enlivened by architectural elements or ground level retail. The Twelfth Avenue façade has a significant presence along Hudson River Park and creative measures should be implemented to enhance this edge.

- **View Corridors and Pedestrian Access to the Hudson River Park**

The design of the project provides opportunities to enhance the status of West 40<sup>th</sup> Street and West 34<sup>th</sup> Street as important view corridors and access streets to Hudson River Park. In particular, expanded sidewalk widths, tree plantings and minimization of curb cuts can be used to enhance pedestrian circulation space and create a pleasant pedestrian environment. The Commission believes that the proposed open space plazas along West 34<sup>th</sup> Street and the

plaza at Eleventh Avenue and West 40<sup>th</sup> Street will be critical to creating strong connections to the River and encourages careful attention to the detailing of seating, plantings and other features of these spaces.

- **Javits Center Façade**

With its expansion to the north and increase in height, the facility will be approximately six blocks in length and become one of the longest façades in Manhattan. Meeting this challenge through features that break up the façade and provide transparency should continue to be a priority for the design as it is further developed.

- **Incorporate Sustainable Design**

The Commission encourages the proposed incorporation of sustainable design features in the building which would result in the Project attaining Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification.

### **Hotel Site**

The Commission recognizes the need for a convention style hotel located near the Javits Center and believes that the proposed location of the hotel at the site between West 35<sup>th</sup> and West 36<sup>th</sup> along Eleventh Avenue is the most appropriate location. The Commission also recognizes that the Amtrak easement, the MTA easements for facilities, and the parking garage easement on this site add complexity to development at this location that may prevent the building from fully complying with the tower setback zoning requirements. As design for the hotel tower proceeds, it should nevertheless comply with the zoning setback requirements insofar as possible. The Commission is pleased to note that all other zoning regulations governing the site, including bulk, streetwalls, retail, sidewalk widenings, and street trees will be adhered to.

### **33/34<sup>th</sup> Street Mixed Use Development**

The Commission is pleased that the design guidelines included in the GPP and developed in consultation with Department of City Planning staff provide sidewalk widenings, streetwall and retail provisions, tower setbacks, open space, and parking requirements. These design components are critical to ensuring that the development as a whole reflects the building forms and urban design of the Hudson Yards area. As design development pursuant to the design guidelines proceeds, the design team should continue to consider and address the following:

- **Building Heights**

Building heights should step down from Eleventh Avenue to Twelfth Avenue, as buildings approach the Hudson River. The Commission recommends any towers above 150 feet in height located within 500 feet of Twelfth Avenue be designed to “step down” to the waterfront with the Tower closer to Twelfth Avenue at least 100 feet lower than an adjacent tower.

- **Orientation of Commercial Uses**

The Eleventh Avenue portion of the site should be developed primarily for commercial use in order to strengthen the identity of Eleventh Avenue as a new commercial corridor. The

location of commercial uses on Eleventh Avenue is also appropriate given the future entrance to the Number 7 Subway Line across Eleventh Avenue and the potential for location of a secondary subway entrance on the site itself along the Eleventh Avenue frontage.

- **Access to the Open Space**

Given the grade changes across the site and the possibility that the open spaces may be at various elevations, the Commission believes that significant portions of the proposed 1.25 acres of open space should be clearly visible from the sidewalk and directly accessible at grade from street level.

- **The Twelfth Avenue Edge**

The streetwall of the Twelfth Avenue development facing Hudson River Park should have a distinctive architectural treatment and consideration should be given to whether it can be enlivened with retail or other uses.

The Commission encourages continued cooperation regarding the project's integration with the future world-class office district and the Hudson River Park. Just as CCDC and ESDC have consulted with the Department of City Planning during the conceptual phase of this project, the Commission looks forward to continuing that collaboration through the final design process.

On a technical note, the Proposed Site Plan in the GPP should be updated to include the sidewalk widening and double row of trees on the south side of West 34<sup>th</sup> Street as described in the Design Guidelines for the 33/34 Street Site.

This letter of support and recommendation was adopted by the City Planning Commission on June 7, 2006 (Commissioner Knuckles absent; Commissioner Phillips abstaining).

Sincerely,

Amanda M. Burden, AICP  
City Planning Commission Chair

C: D. Karnovsky  
R. Barth  
L. Parnes  
E. Ryan  
R. Gastil