

The Hudson Yards Community Advisory Committee

c/o Manhattan Community Board No. 4
330 West 42nd Street, 26th Floor
New York, NY 10036

August 9, 2007

To: Developers Preparing Responses to MTA's Requests for Proposals for Development at the West Side Yard

The development plans for the LIRR West Side Yard are of great interest to the local community. While the Requests for Proposals released by the MTA reflect some of the suggestions we made during the preparation period, they leave many of our concerns unresolved. As you consider your proposals for the Eastern Rail Yard Section (ERY) and/or the Western Rail Yard Section (WRY), we wish to identify the development goals for those sites that will be of particular concern to the West Side community.

- 1. The community supports primarily residential development on the WRY, and a strong plan to maximize the amount of affordable housing on both sites. That housing must be permanently affordable, and it must be integrated with the on-site market-rate housing.** Our neighborhood's diversity is a central component of our character, and these large public sites must be harnessed to enhance, not diminish, that diversity. We are disappointed that the RFPs require so little in this regard, and we expect developers to exceed the minimum requirements set forth by the MTA. From the outset, one of our main development principles has been that residential floor area equal to at least 30% of the housing floor area plus a percentage to be determined of the commercial floor area must be housing that is permanently affordable to low-, moderate- and middle-income residents. This is reflected in the goals that the City set for affordable housing in the Hudson Yards and West Chelsea rezonings. The plan that reaches our goal with the least additional floor area will receive the strongest support in the community.
- 2. The open space on the WRY must be designed and operated as a public park.** It should be designed to encourage use not only by those who will live and work in WRY buildings, but more broadly must be open and inviting to residents of the neighborhoods to the east and south, which have little or no open space for public use. It should draw visitors up along the High Line, from the Hudson River Park and from the commercial corridor to the east. To serve these ends, the park should not be used for private programming like concerts or other private functions. Similarly, it should not include structured active space such as baseball fields or soccer fields, which tend to be dominated by private groups. The open space should instead be reserved for passive recreation and for informal active recreation such as children playing, kite flying, Frisbee throwing and the like. It should include a playground for children and restrooms for the public.
- 3. The entire High Line, including the portion referred to as the "Spur," must be preserved.** We are pleased that the RFPs include the goal, long-held by the community, that the existing High Line structure be retained as linear open space, though we are disappointed that full preservation of the structure is not required. The RFP includes an option to preserve the High Line in its entirety, and we expect and encourage developers to submit proposals that utilize that option.

The Hudson Yards Community Advisory Committee was formed pursuant to the agreement between the Administration and the City Council with respect to the Hudson Yards rezoning in January 2005 to advise the Hudson Yards Development Corporation regarding the financing, planning, design and construction of the Hudson Yards redevelopment area from a neighborhood perspective. Its members include representatives of Manhattan Community Board 4, the area's local elected officials and several local organizations. For more information, see <http://www.manhattancb4.org/HKHY/docs/HYCACstructure.htm>.

The High Line is a critical link in the open space network connecting Hudson River Park and the neighborhoods of the West Side. It is also an invaluable historic resource that will provide the new development with character, anchor it to its specific time and place in history and, based on recent experience in West Chelsea, add real value to adjacent development sites. The preservation of the entire structure, including the “Spur,” is critical. The widened east-west corridor established by the High Line along 30th Street will improve the pedestrian experience on the street and strengthen the connection between the city and the waterfront; to this end, buildings should not be allowed to interrupt the view corridor on the High Line along 30th Street. The High Line landscape should be consistent with the High Line park south of 30th Street, so that the entire High Line is experienced as a consistent park environment.

4. **A pedestrian bridge to Hudson River Park should be provided**, as it will significantly enhance the park and the open space on the WRY and the value of nearby properties. Though the WRY RFP requires only that “provision should be made not to preclude” the bridge, this community will continue to advocate strongly for a guarantee that the bridge will be constructed.
5. **Planning for public facilities is essential.** The scale of the proposed development for the ERY and the WRY is monumental. To be a successful addition to the West Side community, more planning is needed than simply figuring out where to put the buildings and how to keep the trains running underneath. How will people live and work in this new area? Is there adequate capacity to deliver electricity and water and remove sewage? How will public safety be ensured? How can this traffic-choked area absorb the increased congestion that the proposed development will inevitably bring? There is no mention of these fundamental infrastructure concerns in the RFPs, beyond the statement that the City will make water and sewer available in the adjacent streets. Developers should join us in demanding that the City develop a specific, comprehensive plan addressing the infrastructure, public safety and public health requirements of the new ERY and WRY communities, including the infrastructure investments identified—but not planned for—in the original Hudson Yards EIS. Without significant infrastructure investment, the scale of development contemplated in the RFP cannot be sustained.
6. **Commercial development, if proposed for the WRY, should be concentrated along Eleventh Avenue.** The community prioritizes residential development for the WRY and along the entire 30th Street corridor. Overall, commercial development should be minimized and restricted to Eleventh Avenue and east.¹
7. **Sustainable design must be a commitment, not just an aspiration.** Particularly against the background of PlaNYC and the commitments of the Mayor and Governor to environmental sustainability, proposals for both buildings and open space should commit to using designs and construction methods that will meet or exceed the most up-to-date standards for U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver certification.
8. **Parking should be limited.** We are pleased that there is no mandatory parking in the WRY RFP, and that the ERY parking will be significantly reduced from the amount now required by the Zoning Resolution. The community is mindful of the detrimental effects that excessive automobile traffic can have on public health, economic growth and the quality of life of neighborhood residents, and we support limiting parking as much as possible to encourage transit- and pedestrian-oriented development.

¹ Some members of the Community Advisory Committee support convention center expansion plans that would use the West Side Yard. This memo is intended to be consistent with either possibility.

9. **Space should be provided for arts and non-profit uses.** Allocating so much space for a single large Cultural Facility on the ERY is not a priority for us. We are more concerned by the challenges faced by small theatrical arts groups and other theater and artistic support services, which have long been staples of our community and contribute greatly to its character. We prefer a plan that supports and sustains these uses by providing space throughout the new development for small, non-profit theatrical and arts companies. We would also support a change in the Zoning Resolution to allow the site now designated for the Cultural Facility to be used for residential development.

The Hudson Yards Community Advisory Committee had several opportunities to meet with representatives of MTA and Hudson Yards Development Corporation as the RFPs were being prepared, and MTA and HYDC presented their plans to the local community and heard feedback at a public forum on May 8, 2007. We expect to continue this consultation as the planning process moves forward, to ensure that the final plan for on-site development meets local needs as well as those of the MTA. We therefore would welcome the opportunity to meet with you regarding your plans for the sites, in order to communicate our concerns, provide feedback about proposed development plans, and facilitate an open line of communication between developers and the community that will host the new construction. To arrange a meeting, please contact Community Board 4's District Manager Bob Benfatto at 212-736-4536.

We also want to review proposals as they are submitted to the MTA, to ensure that community needs are considered during the selection process. We hope that developers will make the specifics of their proposals public and join us in requesting that the MTA hold an open and publicly accessible selection process. While we understand that some financial details must necessarily be redacted from a public presentation of development proposals, there is precedent for such a public RFP process and we hope to follow that precedent when considering the future of this important public site.

Finally, we expect to participate actively in the various stages of the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) to guarantee that the plan meets the needs of the community and the City as a whole.

We appreciate your attention to our priorities for development on the West Side Yard, and we look forward to further discussion as plans are drawn, revised, submitted and considered for development on one of the most significant, and promising, sites in our city.

cc: MTA - Bill Wheeler, Director of Planning and Roco Krsulic, Director of Real Estate
HYDC – Ann Weisbrod, President and Regina Myer, Senior Vice President, Planning & Design
HYCAC Members