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TESTIMONY BY NEW YORK STATE SENATOR BRAD HOYLMAN
BEFORE THE MULTI-BOARD TASK FORCE
ON EAST MIDTOWN REZONING
(ULURP NOs. N 130247 ZRM and N 130248 ZMM)

May 13, 2013

My name is Brad Hoylman and I represent New York State's 27th Senate District, which includes much of the East Midtown Rezoning study area.

As a rule, I do not weigh in on rezoning proposals until the affected community boards have had their say. This is an exceptional circumstance in that the Multi-board Task Force on East Midtown Rezoning ("the Task Force") has asked me and other elected officials to submit testimony at tonight's hearing.

I'm grateful to the Task Force and its chair, Lola Finkelstein, for all of their hard work. I'm confident that the recommendations that emerge from its study will address many of the community's questions and concerns about the New York City Department of City Planning's ("DCP") plan to rezone East Midtown.

As a State Senator who, along with State Senator Liz Krueger, represents the proposed East Midtown Rezoning study area, I have been closely following the plan put forth by the City and DCP last year. While I understand and appreciate the importance of securing East Midtown's position as a premiere business district to the economic health of our city, I have serious reservations about the proposal and, in particular, the rushed manner in which it is being pushed through the review process. I look forward to the final recommendations put forth by Manhattan Community Boards 5 and 6, as well as those of other Community Boards that are weighing in on this proposal, and I will withhold my final judgment on the application pending their input. Accordingly, I will focus my comments on a few key issues.

I believe it is critical that any plan to rezone East Midtown be preceded by a concrete plan to finance the much-needed improvements to the area's transportation infrastructure in a timely manner. Such infrastructure is fundamental to our city's economy, culture and global stature, and ensuring its long-term viability must be a top priority. Indeed, we must not be put in the position



of relying upon a local rezoning to fund transit infrastructure improvements that benefit the entire region and are urgently needed even without the added density the proposed rezoning would bring. Improvements must be made, and funds must be secured, before we put more pressure on Grand Central Terminal and local subway stations that cannot safely sustain existing ridership, let alone that which would result from new development as well as East Side Access and the extension of the 7 subway line.

I also share other positions put forth by the task force in its “Principles for a New East Midtown,” which is a thoughtful roadmap for dramatically improving the proposal. Specifically, it calls for protections for the many historically and architecturally important buildings in the area; a special review process for new buildings that could significantly alter New York’s iconic skyline; innovative environmental standards; a careful study of the potential adverse impact of this rezoning on demand for office space in the city’s emergent business districts in Hudson Yards, downtown Manhattan, downtown Brooklyn and Long Island City; and a comprehensive vision of the public realm improvements that will be completed by the City and financed by developers.

On this latter point, today we received the good news that in response to requests from Councilmember Garodnick and the Task Force, the City Department of Transportation and DCP have selected an international team to lead the City’s public planning and design process for the East Midtown Public Realm Vision Plan. According to the agencies, “The new consultant team will lead three public workshops in the spring and summer to facilitate discussions with local stakeholders and identify priorities and preferred approaches to enhance the public realm in this area, such as landscaping and public seating, among other treatments.” While I would have liked to have seen this commitment to engaging the community in public realm visioning earlier in the process, I am optimistic that it will result in improved streetscapes and quality of life.

I wish to reiterate my call for the City to slow this process down. Such a consequential proposal, which will transform a large swath of the heart of Manhattan and draw new workers and visitors into an already overburdened transit hub, requires rigorous analysis, deliberation and planning through a robust and comprehensive community-driven review. This rezoning will lay the groundwork for the future of East Midtown and, indeed, the entire city. I see no reason it should be expedited. Rather, I believe the haste with which this proposal is advancing is detrimental to the rezoning study area and the city as a whole.

Thank you for allowing me to present comments and again, I look forward to the task force’s final recommendations.