



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD No. 4

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J. LEE COMPTON
Chair

ANTHONY M. BORELLI
District Manager

January 5, 2006

Charles A. Gargano
Chairman / Commissioner
Empire State Development Corp.

Daniel L. Doctoroff
Deputy Mayor for Economic
Development and Rebuilding
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Michael Petralia
President
NY Convention Center Development Corporation
633 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10017-6706

Amanda M. Burden
Director
Department of City Planning
22 Reade Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: Convention Center Hotel

Dear Messrs. Gargano, Petralia, and Doctoroff and Ms. Burden:

At the December 14, 2005 meeting of the Board's Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use Committee Steve Witkoff of the Witkoff Group and Ted Brumleve of Brennan Beer Gorman Architects presented their preliminary proposal for construction of a convention center hotel on Eleventh Avenue between 35th and 37th Streets. Although the Witkoff Group proposal presents several features that are difficult for the board to support, it illustrates that a location closer to 34th Street would be vastly superior for a convention center hotel than the site at 42nd Street and Eleventh Avenue.

The Witkoff Group has recently purchased several properties in the Hudson Yards Large Scale Plan Subdistrict, including the western end of block 708, on Eleventh Avenue between 36th and 37th Streets, immediately across the street from the main entrance of the current Javits Convention Center. This location offers many advantages over the site previously discussed for location of the convention center hotel, which is the eastern end of block 1089, five blocks to the north at 42nd Street and Eleventh Avenue (the Silverstein site):

- The Silverstein site would, in all likelihood, have to be acquired by condemnation, and developed with public funds, while the Witkoff site is immediately available for development with significant private financing.
- A convention center hotel on the Silverstein site could not be connected to the convention center until the MTA's Quill Bus Garage is relocated and Phase II of the Javits expansion plan is completed, both of which seem increasingly less likely to occur. A convention center hotel on the Witkoff Group site could be immediately connected to the heart of the convention center, with a connection under Eleventh Avenue at 36th Street, and could serve the expanded convention center regardless of whether the expansion occurs to the north, as currently proposed, or to the south, as this Board and many others believe is preferred.
- The 42nd Street corridor surrounding the Silverstein site is developing nicely on its own, with large residential projects underway that are consistent with the underlying zoning. Indeed, the Silverstein site is currently being prepared by its owner for development as a residential tower, making

condemnation for a hotel problematic from a policy perspective and likely to be very expensive in any event. In contrast, a convention center hotel on the Witkoff site could be used to help trigger commercial development in the portion of Hudson Yards where development is necessary in order for the financial expectations for the Hudson Yards plan to be realized.

The Witkoff Group proposal includes development also on block 707 to the south, on the concrete open space between 35th and 36th Streets that is sometimes familiarly referred to as Stonehenge Park. The hotel would bridge over 36th Street and rise approximately 47 stories or 545 feet. 36th Street would remain open to vehicles and pedestrians, but the building would otherwise be a two-block long slab from 35th to 37th Streets, creating a visual barricade along 36th Street, and turning 36th Street into a tunnel. This aspect of the proposal is seriously problematic for this Board, as it is contrary to planning principles we have supported in the past, such as respecting the grid system and maintaining visual and physical access to the waterfront.

On the other hand, the Witkoff Group proposes that the new building would be “green,” built to LEEDs gold rating standards. We welcome such a commitment, and hope that it will inspire other private developers in the area to do the same.

As its nickname implies, Stonehenge Park is now unattractive and underutilized open space. While it is not mapped as park or open space, we believe it is publicly owned.¹ The site has been alternatively identified as expansion space for the convention center (in the 2004 Javits expansion plans, confirmed by the 2004 Javits legislation) or a private commercial development site (in the City’s Preferred Direction for Hudson Yards, which was the basis for the Hudson Yards rezoning). This Board has no opposition in concept to development of a convention center hotel on this site, but every effort must be made to include high-quality public open space in any development scenario.

While we have heard rumors of other convention center hotel proposals, the Witkoff Group’s is the only proposal that has been presented to us. We would welcome the opportunity to consider other proposals. It is premature for us to endorse any individual proposal, but we are grateful to the Witkoff Group for having consulted the community so early in the process, and we believe their proposal confirms the advantages of locating the hotel in closer proximity to the convention center. We encourage you to give the Witkoff Group proposal serious consideration.

Sincerely,



J. Lee Compton
Chair
Manhattan Community Board No. 4



Anna Hayes Levin
Co-Chair
Clinton/Hell’s Kitchen Land Use Committee



Simone Sindin
Co-Chair
Clinton/Hell’s Kitchen Land Use Committee

cc: Local elected officials
Steve Witkoff, The Witkoff Group, 220 E. 42nd St., 10017

¹ The Hudson Yards DGEIS and other City records list “National Railroad ETA” as the owner, while other public documents indicate that the New York Convention Center Development Corporation is the owner. We would appreciate clarification of the site’s ownership.