



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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Dmitri V. Konon, P.E.
Vice President Capital Programs
NYC Economic Development Corporation
110 William Street
New York, NY 10038

Re: Upgrades to the West Side Passenger Ship Terminal

Dear Mr. Konon:

Thank you for your recent presentation to the Waterfront & Parks Committee of Manhattan Community Board 4 (CB4) regarding the ongoing and proposed future changes and upgrades to the West Side Passenger Ship Terminal, including Piers 88 and 90. In general, CB4 found much to like about many elements of the new design, including the signage and treatments at the entrances to the two piers and, in particular, the regained access to the waterside circular plaza at the southern end of the facility. However, as you are aware, we are very unhappy about the almost 4-block long steel fence that physically and visually separates the terminal from the public. In addition, we have several additional (mostly positive) comments on other aspects of the design.

Kudos

We found the overall design (with the notable exception of the fence, as we note in the next section) to be esthetically pleasing and a considerable improvement over the current situation. The design now presents a much friendlier and more welcome face to both users of the facility as well as neighborhood residents and visitors to Hudson River Park, within which the facility exists. The traffic circulation around the entrance to Pier 88 is much superior, and permits a much more pedestrian-friendly plaza-like entryway to the pier itself, including pedestrian seating. We regret that a similar approach to Pier 90 was not possible. The overhead treatment for lighting and signage for both piers, with the curved structure that announces the pier itself and partially covers the unattractive double layer roadway above is a welcome design feature.

In addition, we appreciate the reopening of the waterside circular plaza at the southern end of the facility, which has been closed ever since 9/11. Had NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC) done nothing else except to announce this availability,

with no further design considerations, that in and of itself would have been reason to applaud. In fact, that you basically presented a blank slate and asked the community to provide comments regarding uses, design considerations and suggestions is much appreciated. These comments will be provided below, following the next section on The Fence.

The Fence

However, the nearly 4-block long, monotonous, tall, semi-transparent steel fence that is planned to run along the entire front of the facility is unwelcome and regrettable, to say the least. The best that can be said about it is that it will look somewhat better than the chain-link fence that it will replace. Its long length is unbroken, with the exception only of two wide sliding openings at the entrances to the two piers (but only when cruise ships are in port). At other times, it will be a very long grey wall between the public and the water's edge, a concept that is the antithesis of that being realized by Hudson River Park and other emerging waterfront parks to reconnect the city's residents and visitors to its beautiful waterfront after years of being blocked by ugly barriers.

We have long questioned the actual security value of this fence and are given to understand, from previous meetings with EDC, that the need stems less from requirements of the Department of Homeland Security as from convenience issues regarding the operation of the facility. When we asked, at the meeting, why a more transparent fence (such as glass fence) was not considered, we were told that such a fence would be prohibitively expensive, given security requirements. Yet the drawing showed clearly that, when ships were in port, the fence would be opened very wide and that there would be no security guards to prevent anyone from entering the facility by foot, and even walking around to the back side of the fence. In fact we were told that security would be akin to that of an airport, and that visitors would not encounter any security until they were inside the terminal building (in fact, just like an airport). So what, then, is the high security requirement of this fence that drives the cost so high that glass is precluded? What, in fact, is the need for this fence at all? It seems only to be to keep people out when ships are not in, the gates are closed and the facility is closed.

Further, it was never explained why the inter-pier bulkhead area needed to be closed to public access when the facility was closed. Certainly we can understand closing and locking the terminal itself, but why close the bulkhead area between the piers which could provide additional public access to the water's edge?

We have, in the course of previous discussions with and letters to EDC, expressed our dislike for this fence in any form, and our opinion that if a fence was needed, that it be as transparent as possible. Having now seen the current design, which includes pedestrian-friendly entry plazas on the other (west or back) side of the fence, and understanding, as was explained to us, that actual security begins inside the terminal entrance, which is even further inside the line of the fence, we now ask that you remove this fence in its entirety, or remove as much of it as is possible. We further ask that, if any fence is needed at all, that it be transparent, or as transparent as possible.

The Circular Plaza

This circular open area partially under the southern traffic access ramp, was a popular spot for waterfront views, and, in particular, for close up views of passenger or cruise liners moored up to the south side of Pier 88, before it was closed to public access shortly after 9/11. Given the scarcity of public waterfront access between Piers 84 and Clinton Cove north of Pier 94, and given that this area lies within the boundaries of Hudson River Park which surrounds it, the announcement by EDC that it would be reopened to public use is, perhaps, the most welcomed and appreciated part of the entire PST upgrade project from the perspective of CB4. EDC asked CB4 for suggestions on uses for this area that might inform its design. Ideas were posed that ranged from a flat surface suitable for booths or exhibits (for a bazaar, for instance) to an area populated with seating and other fixtures. After discussion, the following ideas and suggestion emerged:

1. A common problem with waterfront seating furniture is that it often places the eye level of a seated person at the same height as the rail, interrupting one's view of the water. This led to the opinion that some of the plaza area might be raised so as to elevate seated users with sightlines over the bulkhead railings.
2. It was expressed that the idea of organized events using exhibits, pop-tents or the like was unlikely at this plaza, especially given the closeness of this plaza to Pier 84 which has plenty of room for such events. A more passive role for this plaza is, therefore, envisioned, with numerous opportunities for seating. This reinforced the notion that portions of the plaza might be raised, as expressed in #1 above.
3. Lighting for this area should be as un-obtrusive as possible and should not interfere with the ability to see clearly to the water and beyond.
4. An idea suggested by EDC to employ physical elements from the interior of the pier as design elements was met favorably.
5. Finally it was noted that the much disliked fence mentioned above extended in front of this entire public plaza, with a small doorway-style opening to gain access to the plaza. This seemed to make absolutely no sense whatsoever, and at the meeting, EDC quickly agreed that the fence in this area served no purpose and suggested to remove it, starting at the southern edge of Pier 88. We obviously agree and applaud this decision, and hope and expect that this offer will be honored as the project continues.

Other Comments and Suggestions

1. Sustainable construction and operation of this facility should be a goal of this project, in keeping with the Mayor's PlaNYC vision.
2. Lighting throughout should be as subtle and unobtrusive as possible.

You have agreed to continue to review the design with CB4 as it progresses, particularly with regard to the circular plaza, and we look forward to a return visit.

Again, CB4 thanks you for your consideration of our wishes, desires and concerns regarding this project. With the sole exception of the fence, we feel that this design will be a welcome improvement toward making this facility more community and park friendly, and a project that we can all be proud of.

Sincerely,



Jean-Daniel Noland, Chair Manhattan Community Board 4



Capt. John Doswell, Co-Chair
Waterfronts & Parks Committee



John D. Lamb, Co-Chair
Waterfront & Parks Committee

Cc: Mayor Bloomberg
Art Commission of the City of New York
Department of Homeland Security / USCG
Connie Fishman, President/CEO HRPT
Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer
Speaker Christine Quinn
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Senator Thomas Duane
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Madeline Wils, Economic Development Corporation