

## **Community Board 7/Manhattan**

# **Core Principles and Key Recommendations for the Proposed Riverside Center Project**

February 4, 2010

### **Introduction:**

This document is a summary of Community Board 7's leading responses to the proposed Extell Riverside Center project, now being considered for ULURP certification by the City Planning Department. This statement is intended to highlight core principles and key recommendations only, which should be read to apply generally to the entirety of the proposed design. The absence of a specific note or concern as to any particular aspect of the proposed design should not be interpreted as an acceptance or endorsement of those specifics. *The Core Principles and Key Recommendations below are not ranked or presented in priority order.* All are essential and valued by Community Board 7 and the community. We look forward to developing and sharing greater detail and specificity as the review process continues.

In the last two and one half years, we have met with the Extell team in well-attended public meetings and in smaller working sessions. We have also held numerous meetings with neighborhood groups and organizations within the community. The CB7 Riverside Center Working Group has particularly benefited from the excellent, tireless liaison and help offered by the staff of the City Planning Department, and from CB7's own technical consultants, BF&J and Kwartler Associates, as well as from planning and architectural experts within the community.

As we stated in an April 18, 2008 letter to Mr. Gary Barnett, President of Extell Development Company, which contained an earlier, less detailed statement of our concerns,

“... we urge you now to take our comments and priorities seriously, since they reflect long term community concerns, as well as future planning and development needs of the Upper West Side. We hope that these statements and priorities will stimulate a genuine community consultative dialogue with you in advance of any certified application, just as we hope that city agencies will make use of our criteria and observations to guide them in their own technical and legal review of your application.”

In January 2009, Community Board 7 submitted detailed comments and testimony on the Draft Scope of Work for the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. This response was also the product of careful deliberation and analysis by many individuals and groups.

We have been told that the Extell application may be certified for ULURP in Spring, 2010. We are of course well aware that the ULURP process will offer the official opportunity for participation and comment by the Community Board and the public, as well as for the Borough President, the City Planning Commission, the City Council and the Mayor. Nevertheless, as part of our planning process, we offer these comments and recommendations to you and to the City Planning Department, to the developer, and to others, in the hope and belief that a collaborative dialogue and articulation of priorities and needs can genuinely improve this private project for the community, the city and for the broader public, as well as for the applicant.

## Core Principles for the Riverside Center Project

### Zoning and Density

Provide for zoning and built density that is appropriate to the context and infrastructure, and is reflective of superior urban design.

### Public Open Space

Create clearly defined open space that facilitates and encourages public use, activities and access, serving a broad spectrum of residents, neighbors and visitors. Delineate a clear distinction between public and private spaces that discourages the perception of building enclaves as separate from the rest of the city and neighborhood. Ensure minimum impact of wind and shadows on all public and common areas by careful placement of private buildings and by attention to building form.

### Connectivity and Circulation

Create connectivity from the project to its surrounding neighborhood, to the waterfront and within the project itself by:

- Promoting access and circulation for pedestrians by means of mapped streets and public pathways;
- Promoting public and alternative modes of transportation;
- Minimizing the use and impact of autos and trucks.

### Transportation and Traffic

Provide access to public transportation that links Riverside Center and Riverside South to the city grid, promotes mass transit, and reduces congestion and pollution from commercial and private vehicles.

### Streetscape

Promote excellent and animated streetscape design and landscaping that emulates the best of traditional Upper West Side parks and public spaces, together with innovative 21<sup>st</sup> century examples of new green spaces that will work and welcome everyone.

### Retail/Cultural Facilities

Create vibrant, innovative, and attractive retail at street level, and cultural facilities that serve local residents and can attract visitors from around the city. Develop cultural, educational, and community facilities and uses above ground and below ground that will create a public benefit and enhance life on the west side and in New York.

### Housing

Promote social and economic diversity in housing type and income. Provide housing that is attractive and affordable to working class families.

### Public Education

Increase public school capacity necessary to serve the current and future needs of the community (Community District 3).

### Sustainability

Promote the highest standard of environmentally responsible practices, activities and uses that are not merely minimal afterthoughts but are integrated into every aspect of design, architecture, and infrastructure. Design to accommodate growing needs for clean and efficient energy production/distribution, waste management, and sanitation for the development and surrounding areas. Design an integrated transportation system that minimizes carbon emissions.

## Key Recommendations for the Riverside Center Project

(Core principles relevant to each recommendation are noted *in italics*.)

### Density

*(Zoning and Density)*

- Reduce overall density by at least 20%, by reduction in all buildings and in number of residential units, and/or by removing at least one building completely.
- Include a comparative analysis of the community low-density alternative, initially described in the SDEIS scoping document.
- Provide and justify FAR calculations for all buildings, including street mapping alternatives and building height reductions.

### Site Plan

*(Public Open Space, Streetscape)*

- Consider alternatives that maximize public open space by rearranging building placement, perhaps flipping buildings 2 and 4.
- Consider placing the public school on 59<sup>th</sup> Street.
- Consider moving Building 4 to street front of 59<sup>th</sup> Street to increase public open space.
- Consider reconfiguring buildings to include at least one lower-rise building with green features on roof for public access.
- Place lobby entrances for all buildings along street fronts, especially around the perimeter streets of 59<sup>th</sup>, 61<sup>st</sup>, West End Avenue, and Riverside Blvd.
- Consider alternative site plans by community groups submitted to CB7, and posted on [www.nyc.gov/mcb7](http://www.nyc.gov/mcb7).

## Public Open Space

*(Public Open Space, Streetscape, Public Education)*

- Include destination attractions such as sculpture garden, performance space, and recreation features, as well as clear view corridors.
- Minimize shadows and wind on open spaces and sidewalks.
- Build in a gentle slope (or tiers) across the entire site for pedestrians and to provide variety of routes to the waterfront park.
- Provide a pedestrian bridge at 60<sup>th</sup> Street to Riverside Park.
- Remove the movie theaters and place underground at 59<sup>th</sup> Street in order to increase open space.
- Remove “parking spiral” near Building #4 and relocate Building #4 to street front to provide increased open space.
- Identify street level open space for public school.
- Promote open space views and circulation to the architecturally distinguished Con Ed Power Plant on 59<sup>th</sup> Street, looking toward future adaptive re-use.

Connectivity, and street access and circulation consistent with the city grid as much as possible consistent with the site plan (defined by West End Ave, 59<sup>th</sup> St., Riverside Blvd, 61<sup>st</sup> St.)

*(Public Open Space, Connectivity and Circulation, Retail/Cultural Facilities, Sustainability)*

- Establish 61<sup>st</sup> Street and 59<sup>th</sup> Street as major corridors to Riverside Park.
- Establish 60<sup>th</sup> Street as an internal pedestrian public way with easy public access from 61<sup>st</sup> and 59<sup>th</sup> Streets.
- Orient buildings and lobby entrances to face streets in order to complement natural flow of pedestrian and vehicular traffic.
- Develop vibrant, active retail on street level.

- Create wide sidewalks (21 ft) with plantings, and benches to encourage pedestrian traffic.
- Remove “service” and “back door” elements on 59<sup>th</sup> Street -- minimize curb cuts and garage entrances.
- Add a traffic light at 59<sup>th</sup> Street at the west for access to park and to Riverside Center.
- Consider a site plan that takes into account access to and use of Riverside South Park in the scenario in which the highway is buried.

Vehicular Circulation, Alternative Transportation, and Parking  
*(Connectivity and Circulation, Transportation and Traffic, Sustainability)*

- Maintain 61<sup>st</sup> Street, West End Ave, 59<sup>th</sup> Street, and Riverside Boulevard as vehicular corridors.
- Unify parking to one garage that serves the entire complex.
- Minimize points of access for underground loading/unloading (similar to Rockefeller Center).
- Maximize underground circulation to accommodate infrastructure needs.
- Reduce overall parking by at least 30%. Promote shared parking, zip cars and other measures to reduce automobile trips.
- Provide detailed information about current (in Riverside South and on the parking lots between 59<sup>th</sup> and 61<sup>st</sup> Streets) and planned parking capacity and utilization.
- Evaluate all proposed uses in terms of minimizing vehicular use and congestion and in terms of efficiency of surrounding street network.
- Provide for bicycle lanes within the development and connecting to the Manhattan Waterfront Greenway. Provide bicycle parking within buildings and along travel routes.

- Maximize opportunities for public bus service to replace current and future van services.
- Investigate the possible construction of light rail and a nearby Metro North station to serve the development and the surrounding area.

### Mixture of Uses

*(Retail/Cultural Facilities, Housing)*

- Design for vibrant, varied, innovative retail that will attract and serve the community.
- Provide for mixed income housing in each building, a minimum of 20% affordable low and moderate income housing units.
- Consider alternatives to the hotel since there are several that serve the area.
- Place movie theaters underground.
- Eliminate below ground auto dealership, consider uses such as Children's Museum, cultural facilities, Chelsea Market, others.

### Public Education

*(Retail/Cultural Facilities, Public Education)*

- Build a new public school facility to accommodate 1,250 students in grades Pre-K through 8 on the site and support all students in Community District 3.
- Design a public school with sufficient classrooms to meet applicable class size targets and provide dedicated separate space for science, music, art and assemblies, as well as typical allotment of space for administration, guidance and service-providers.
- Include an outdoor public school yard and play spaces appropriate to all ages served by the school that can be used both during the instructional day and for after school programs.

Environmentally Responsible Design  
(Sustainability)

- Design for LEED Platinum.
- Explore co-generation options and other clean energy alternatives.
- Examine existing sanitation and waste management systems and develop alternatives that optimize efficiency and quality of life for the development and the Upper West Side.
- Account for flood plain potential in EIS.

**RIVERSIDE CENTER MINORITY REPORT**  
**February 23, 2010**

We, members of CB7, disagree with the resolution of the board outlining the “core principles” and “specific recommendations” that should guide the approval of Extell’s plans for developing the Riverside South site, between 59<sup>th</sup> St. and 61<sup>st</sup> Street, West End Ave and the West Side Highway. We therefore submit this minority report, as provided for in CB7’s by-laws, to be circulated with CB7’s resolution.

We are mindful that the developer has a right to develop the area according to a previously approved plan, but that elements of that plan are no longer viable, and that the developer—for practical and financial reasons—seeks a planning alteration which the City of New York can approve at its discretion. We also agree with the majority that the currently effective 1993 plan no longer meets community needs and should be altered.

We do not object to the fact that Extell seeks changes that would increase its profits from the project, but with the majority we agree that the value of the project to our community and to the city also needs to be increased, and that new plans that increase the profitability for the developer must also advance the interests of our community.

We recognize, with the majority, the difficulty of accepting alterations in plans that would provide greater profit to the developer without simultaneously providing key community benefits. The developer has made a number of proposals in the new plan that would allow greater density—that is more and larger units of housing—and would allow a higher intensity of use of the underground space, but has not included proposals that would significantly advance the community’s interest in affordable housing, and other matters. With the majority, we therefore oppose the proposed Extell plan as inadequate. However we disagree with the majority on the reasons why it is inadequate.

The majority has taken the position that the project as proposed is “too dense”, and that it should be reduced by 20% of the FAR. We disagree; the site can be planned to accept higher density without damage to the community. Higher density does equate to significantly higher potential development profits. We believe a portion of this advantage must be used to ensure that the development provide homes to families of varied incomes, and not solely higher incomes. We believe this mix should be self funded, using a portion of the additional profits made possible by the changed plan.

The majority position is that underground parking should be cut by 30%. We disagree. We see no reason to artificially limit the amount of residential (accessory) parking at this location because of its ready access to the West Side Highway. The additional cars can be handled with very little impact on local streets. The convenience of available parking will help attract multi-car suburban families to relocate to the city where they will most likely have a single car, with benefit to families and to the city and with a corresponding reduction in the impact of cars on our region. Further, this area was recently host to large parking lots of several hundred cars owned by families in CB7, cars mostly used for weekend travel. We think the parking garage should allow monthly parking for residents of our area under the rubric of accessory parking. Also, because of its proximity to the West Side Highway, the underground garage should include transient parking, which would assist the large and growing educational and broadcast institutions near this location, and some of the new office development in the upper 50s.

The majority wishes to extend the street grid into this area, with buildings and their lobbies on the streets, street walls, and store-fronts either throughout the area, or along WEA. It also objects to some types of businesses, and requests support for other types. We do not think the community is best served by requiring that the project area be stamped with the current street grid, although we agree that the developer should be permitted to construct commercial facilities along WEA and within the site, if so desired.

With the majority, we believe the proposed development is so large that the plans should include provisions for services and retail stores, schools and recreation.

The majority wishes the project to treat 59<sup>th</sup> Street as its front door, especially so that it would be hospitable to the potential redevelopment of the power station. We disagree, as 59<sup>th</sup> street is heavily used by trucks (with plans for the expansion of the SWAMP commercial refuse station), and is best used as an area for service providers, some retail and for service and garage entrance to the residential buildings. The majority proposes no alternative location for these functions.

The majority is concerned that the design not isolate the area from the rest of the community in the manner of some nearby super-blocks, and some other tower-in-the-park developments in CB7. We agree, and believe the current design—which will be changed to reduce the height of some buildings—reflects that concern. However, the majority has not emphasized the need to correct the problem that cuts this area off from the waterfront park—the elevated west side highway that effectively fences off the waterfront from our residential areas. We think the highway in this section should be buried and covered by park land, obviating the need for pedestrian bridges.

The majority calls for 21 ft sidewalks through the site, and provision for alternate transportation (presumably pedaled or power-assisted bikes.) We think pedestrian paths should be separate from bike paths, and path widths correspondingly reduced.

The majority calls on the developer to construct a 1200 seat public school on the site, and provide playground space for the school. We believe that an area should be set aside for a high quality facility, or several such facilities, and that the school(s) have the right to use some of the parking and recreation area. However, the Department of Education and the School Construction Fund—which currently fail to provide adequate facilities to our community--must become part of this planning requirement, as we cannot achieve what needs to be done solely by requirements on a developer who lacks authority over schools.

Similarly, the majority seeks below ground trash collections: the Department of Sanitation must become part of this plan. The majority seeks adequate public transportation. The TA and the MTA must become part of this planning.

Respectfully submitted:

Thomas Vitullo-Martin  
Jay Adolph