



CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
CITY OF NEW YORK

July 26, 2021

Eric J. Gertler, President and CEO
Empire State Development
633 Third Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10017

Dear Mr. Gertler,

The City Planning Commission (the "Commission") has reviewed the General Project Plan (the "GPP") for the proposed Brooklyn Developmental Center Mixed-Use Project, a Land Use Improvement and Residential Project (the "Project"), dated May 20, 2021. The GPP is subject to Commission review pursuant to the provisions of Subdivision 3 of Section 16 of the New York State Urban Development Corporation Act, which provide that a planning board or commission may recommend approval, disapproval or modification of a general project plan, whenever such plan requires the override of local law or regulation for implementation. The Project proposes the override of the Zoning Resolution and other local law with respect to use regulations, floor area and open space regulations, height and setback controls, minimum distance between buildings, signage and parking regulations.

The goal of the Project is to dispose and redevelop the approximately 26 acres parcel of land that is part of a larger block formerly occupied by the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities' Brooklyn Developmental Center (BDC) campus to create approximately 2,600 units of affordable housing, commercial and community facility space (including a senior center, a One Brooklyn Health Clinic, and a community center), light industrial space (intended for vertical farming/agriculture, a Meals-on-Wheels kitchen, and other light manufacturing), approximately one-acre of urban farm, approximately 800 accessory parking and supporting uses, approximately four acres of publicly accessible open spaces and approximately two acres of private open space. Approximately 231 units are proposed to be set aside for seniors and 503 units would be designated as supportive housing for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, residents with behavioral health issues, the frail elderly, youth aging out of foster care, the formerly incarcerated, and military service members with disabilities. The GPP would require that 100 percent of the units developed as part of the Project be targeted to households earning between 30 and 80 percent of Area Median Income (AMI).

This memo serves as a response to the Empire State Development Corporation's (ESD) request for a letter of recommendation from the Commission in relation to the Project. The Commission conveys the below comments to the ESD project team.

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The Commission believes that the Project is appropriate. The proposed density is in context with the density and general height and setback of buildings developed by the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) throughout the Spring Creek area. Additionally, the proposed density is appropriate given the general width of the streets and the proximity to the new job opportunities and open spaces to be located on site.

The Commission applauds ESD's collaboration with the NYC Department of City Planning (DCP) to develop a good site plan and excellent building design for the Project. In response to the DCP staff's concerns, the project team has engaged in a thoughtful process with DCP staff to address these issues. While the Commission supports the Project and the exercise of ESD's statutory authority, the Commission urges ESD to consider and address the following concerns with the Project's design.

Connection to The Fountains

The Commission is pleased to see non-residential uses, such as commercial and community facility space, proposed at the ground floors of buildings along Fountain Avenue and Erskine Street, and along the proposed South Street, which would provide needed services to area residents and activate these pedestrian corridors at the street level. The Commission encourages ESD and the project developer to include non-residential uses along the proposed North Street, with special attention to the intersection of the proposed East Walk and Schroeder's Walk to ensure an active and inviting transition between the The Fountains and the project.

Furthermore, the development team should approach the design of both Schroeder's Walk and North Street holistically, while prioritizing the pedestrian experience. The original site plan for The Fountains anticipated a second phase on the Project site, and it had planned for a street that acted like a seam to tie the two phases. The project, however, includes numerous back-of-house activities, such as curb cuts and parking garages entrances and frontages, which tend to be disruptive to the pedestrian experience. Accordingly, the Commission urges ESD to add pedestrian amenities, minimize the amount of curb cuts along North Street, and either wrap parking with active uses and/or screen parking. Special care should be given to the transition between the pedestrian walkway proposed in the Fountains and North Street. Additionally, the current heights proposed on the southside of North Street are more than 10 stories higher than The Fountains buildings heights located on the northern side of the street. ESD should create a better relationship to the adjacent scale, either through more gradual increase building heights or building setbacks, along North Street to improve transition and achieve a better alignment with the context of The Fountains.

Fountain Avenue

Based on the flood plain and the current character of Fountain Avenue, the proposed surface parking spine separates the Avenue from the proposed mixed-use buildings. With buildings and their entrances set back 200 feet and separated from the public street and sidewalk by a deadening sea of parking, the Commission is concerned that this portion of the Project creates an unwelcome pedestrian experience. Without any active uses at the street line that bring eyes on the street to enhance pedestrian security, there is little to encourage anyone to walk along this street from The Fountains and HPD Gateway neighborhood to the north to the newly established

407-acre regional Shirley Chisholm State Park. While the Commission understands that enclosing the parking at this location is costly, it strongly encourages ESD to enhance the pedestrian experience and security along Fountain Avenue. ESD should explore strategies such as expanding the sidewalk between the proposed buildings and the surface parking, and enhancing the landscaped buffer and pedestrian amenities, so as to create a greater separation between the pedestrian activity and the parking lots.

Ground Floor Conditions

The ground floors of the proposed buildings facing public streets should generally comply with the provisions of Sections 37-34 and 37-35 of the NYC Zoning Resolution, Minimum Transparency Requirements and Parking Wrap and Screening Requirements, respectively. A minimum of 50 percent of the area between two and 12 feet above curb level should be transparent, with no blank walls to exceed more than 10 feet in width. All ground-floor parking should be fully wrapped by other uses and not visible from public sidewalks.

Streets and Sidewalks

The Project site plan is proposed to be well integrated with the surrounding street network, including the creation of three new public streets (North Street, South Street, and Field Drive), and four privately-owned, publicly accessible shared pathways (Creek West, West Walk, East Walk, and Park Walks). Several non-residential uses are located on the ground-floor level of existing and proposed streets. The Commission encourages ESD to include, seating, plantings, lighting and other amenities along all sidewalks in the Project, including landscaped strips in front of residential uses on the ground-floor, to ensure an inviting and comfortable pedestrian experience for residents and community members. Furthermore, along North and Erskine streets, and Fountain and Seaview avenues, a minimum sidewalk width of 15 feet with a 10-foot-wide clear path and a five foot wide street tree planting and amenity strip, should be provided. The City's standard street tree planting requirements should be adhered to along all street frontages.

Building Design

The design guidelines for the Project provide design controls for the mixed-use buildings located throughout the Project, setting parameters for the provision of horizontal and vertical breaks to generate variety and visual interest, to break up large masses and frontages, and to differentiate the buildings along the street frontages. Nonetheless, the Commission recommends that setbacks be mandated in the envelopes as illustrated in the design guidelines. The Commission requests that this be accomplished by providing for visual breaks through variation in massings and changes in planes, materials and glazing/fenestration. The buildings should have clear divisions in the façade design, with particular attention to definition and differentiation in treatment at the lower first and second floors, as well as, the 'lower base' of the building that most affects the pedestrian experience. The buildings should also provide variation and articulation at the upper portions of the buildings, e.g., cornice lines or articulated parapet details, massing variation and dormers that contribute to the overall streetscape profile of the buildings.

3-Line Subway Expansion

The Commission encourages ESD to work with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) to evaluate the extension of the 3-Line subway from the New Lots Avenue station to Spring Creek. Currently, the 3-Line subway terminates at New Lots Avenue, which is half a mile

north of the Project in East New York. The Commission encourages the MTA to consider extending the Line south by 10 blocks along Elton Street, which would provide service to residents of the Spring Creek area, including ESD's project sites, HPD's mixed-use Gateway development, the Flatlands/Fairfield Industrial Business Zone, and the Linden and Boulevard NYC Housing Authority campuses.

The affordable housing proposed as part of the Project, combined with the recent housing developed by ESD at The Fountains and by HPD at Gateway, will bring thousands of new households to this area. As described in OneNYC, a balance between housing and job opportunities are essential to sustain long-term prosperity and equity in neighborhoods and throughout New York City.

The Commission applauds ESD for developing a holistic proposal for this large site with a mix of uses, including housing, commercial and job-generating uses, as well as community resources and open space, as suggested during the deliberation of The Fountains Mixed-Use Land Use and Residential Development. Overall, the Commission believes that project will be a beneficial use of underutilized property which that will provide needed affordable housing, including housing for seniors and people with disabilities. Overall, and with the refinements expressed in this letter, the Commission is pleased to see the Project move forward.

Very truly yours,
Marisa Lago
Chair