



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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Chair

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District Manager

May 8, 2009

Barbara P. Lampen, President
New York Convention Center Development Corporation
633 Third Avenue – 33rd Floor
New York, NY 10017-8167

Dear President Lampen:

Manhattan Community Board No. 4 is pleased to submit the following comments on the General Project Plan, dated March 19, 2009, for the proposed Jacob K. Javits Convention Center Renovation and Expansion Civic Project. These comments were approved at CB4's meeting on May 6, 2009.

CB4 is a strong supporter of a world-class convention center for the city, believing it would create direct and indirect jobs, as well as general economic vitality. Properly sited and designed, it also could enhance our neighborhood. In our June 12, 2006 letter commenting on the 2006 plan to expand the Javits Center, the board lamented that the opportunity to create such a world-class convention center was being lost, with a plan that had been trimmed to suit financial and political expediency. We also commented that there appeared to be a significant danger that large public sums would be spent on a facility that did not meet market demands, was expensive to operate and had inadequate room for future expansion.

After extensive due diligence, a review completed in June 2007 by the New York Convention Center Development Corporation concluded that the actual cost of constructing the project delineated in the 2006 GPP would be significantly greater than the \$1.684 billion estimated cost adopted in the Plan of Finance. This forced the consideration and analysis of alternatives that would permit the project to proceed without additional funding. The present GPP details the first phase of this newly-defined project.

The principal component of the project is the renovation of the existing Javits Center, designed to respond to the immediate needs of the convention and trade show industry by improving the existing building conditions and enabling the Center to continue operating. The renovation is structured to be implemented in order of priority need, with construction scheduled and sequenced to maintain existing operations at all times.

The GPP also proposes a 100,000 square foot expansion for the block bounded by 39th and 40th Streets, and by Eleventh and Twelfth Avenues. The manufactured Exhibition Structure would contain 40,000 net square feet of exhibition space and 60,000 sf of support and core functions. The structure would connect to the existing Javits Center at the level 2 concourse through a 15' wide connecting corridor that would block 39th Street.

Although this structure is referred to as an "Expansion Structure," its primary function is to provide substitute space for portions of the Center as they are taken out of service for renovation, enabling Javits to remain open and fully operational at all times with the same amount of exhibition space. At the completion of the renovation, the 40,000 sf of exhibition space would remain in service as a modest expansion, complementing existing operations.

The project is budgeted at \$463M, with \$391M allocated for the renovation, \$39M for the expansion structure and \$33M for soft costs.

Our position on this matter is one of long standing. New York needs a world-class convention center, and while it need not necessarily be the largest, it must be the best at its chosen mission. In its current state of disrepair, the Javits Center is barely functional, let alone world-class.

We have all been aware of the problems associated with the Javits Center in its first 25 years, and had hoped that its renovation and expansion would be an opportunity to make much needed correction. But before embarking on such a project, there needs to be a comprehensive consideration of the city's convention center needs, a defined mission for the Javits Center, and a long-term plan addressing these needs and mission.

In the absence of these, it is difficult to know if the proposed project is the proper way to proceed. If a new convention center somewhere else were to replace the Javits Center in five years, continued band-aid maintenance until that new center opened might be appropriate. If such a new center were to complement the Javits Center, then alterations to the existing Javits Center to fit a new mission could be appropriate. Since these discussions have not yet begun, we think it unlikely that there will be a new convention center in five, or even ten years, and that the current Javits Center must be renovated.

We have the following comments on the proposed renovation project.

1. Design and Energy Efficiency. The renovation calls for the replacement of the dark glass curtain wall with transparent glass. I. M. Pei's original design called for transparent glass, but constrained by energy use requirements and available technology, the dark glass that has loomed over the community for 25 years was substituted. We welcome the availability of new technology and its ability to fulfill Pei's original vision for a transparent, community-friendly structure.

It also calls for the complete replacement of the roof with a green roof and the substitution of high efficiency roof-top mechanical units. We welcome a projected 26%

increase in energy efficiency over the existing building through these measures, as well as improved thermal efficiency and intelligent controls, and note that the renovated building is expected to be certified as LEED Silver.

2. The 33rd/34th Block. From discussions with the Javits Center users, it is imperative that convention operations on the block between 33rd and 34th Streets be disrupted as little as possible. The use of this block for truck marshalling reduces the time needed to set up and tear down shows, thereby increasing the number of shows that can be staged each year, and reduces truck trips into and out of our neighborhood by as many as 300 per show. We are pleased that this need is recognized explicitly in the GPP and that the appropriate commitment has been made.

3. Displacement/Expansion Space. We understand the need for displacement space – there must be a substitute for space taken out of service for renovation. Under the proposed project, however, the 100,000 sf structure would cost \$40M, provide only 40,000 sf of exhibition space and would be separated from the main Javits Center by a corridor more than a block long. The “displacement space” would be remote during the renovation, and once renovation were completed, the new “expansion space” would continue to be remote and inaccessible.

At our request you reexamined what appeared to us to be under-utilized portions of the Javits Center (Halls 1D, 1E and the Galleria/River Pavilion) that could be substituted for the proposed expansion building for all but the largest shows. You completed this and presented us with specific reasons why each of these spaces is unsuitable to replace the expansion space.

You also reported on the strong support for the proposed expansion space from the Friends of Javits, those who produce the shows at Javits, and the concern that the city might lose one or more shows were it not available during renovation. We agree with your assessment of the difficulty of winning shows back once lost to other cities, and appreciate your commitment to both the Friends of Javits and to the hotel industry that is supporting the renovation through the incremental hotel tax.

Although we would have preferred a different outcome, we accept your reasoning and the conclusion of your analysis, and thank you for undertaking it.

We also reluctantly accept your conclusion that 39th Street between Eleventh and Twelfth Avenues is not suitable for pedestrian access to the river because of its dangerous proximity to the construction staging area immediately to the south, as well as to the truck entrance from Twelfth Avenue. We ask, however, that a commitment be made to return 39th Street to full public use if and when it is no longer used by the Javits Center. We specifically oppose any future sale of any of the land north of the Javits Center building that would include the area of 39th Street and not return it to public use.

Until 39th Street once again becomes public access to the river, we welcome your commitment to creating an attractive access corridor on 40th Street and accept your invitation to work with you to create the kind of space the community would welcome.

4. Landscaping and Park Space. We appreciate the decision to defer to the second phase of the project decisions on landscaping, signage and other issues that affect the community directly; we look forward to continued discussions. At this time, since it abuts the proposed displacement/expansion structure, we again would like to express our desire to see the acquisition of the NYPD parking lot between 39th and 40th, with the space turned into a park for the community, as originally planned.

Sincerely,



Jean-Daniel Noland, Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4



J. Lee Compton, Chair
Chelsea Preservation and Planning

CC: NYC Speaker Christine Quinn
Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer
NYS Senate Thomas Duane
NYS Assemblyman Richard Gottfried
Hell's Kitchen Neighborhood Association