



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

330 West 42nd Street, 26th floor New York, NY 10036
tel: 212-736-4536 fax: 212-947-9512
www.nyc.gov/mcb4

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**Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use
Responses to Hudson Yards**

**Testimony at NYS Assembly hearing, re: proposed Javits Center expansion
legislation - June 2003**

Before the: Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions;
Committee on Cities; and
Committee on Tourism, Arts and Sports Development
New York State Assembly
June 21, 2004

Statement on West Side Development Proposal

By
Walter Mankoff, Chair
Manhattan Community Board No. 4

Good morning Chairmen Brodsky, Morello and Stringer and Committee members. My name is Walter Mankoff. I am the Chair of Manhattan Community Board No. 4. Thank you for inviting us to testify today on this very important matter.

Our district extends from 14th Street to 60th Streets, from 8th Avenue to the Hudson River above 26th Street and from 6th Avenue to the river below 26th Street. We encompass the well-established communities of Clinton/Hell's Kitchen and Chelsea. We are highly diverse in terms of income, race and ethnic background. The 12 square block area designated by the Governor's program bill as the 'expansion project" site lies at our district's heart.

Community Board 4 has consistently opposed stadiums on the West Side, ever since they were first proposed many years ago. But the latest version, a 75,000 seat football stadium pretending to do double duty as a convention center, disturbs us the most.

In my few allotted minutes, I want to touch on the key points that concern us most. I ask that my full written testimony be inserted in the record of today's hearing.

Community Board No. 4 supports a thoughtful, appropriate expansion of the Javits Center to bring badly needed additional jobs and business to our City. The grafting of a stadium onto the Javits is not the way to achieve these goals. Not only does it not provide the Javits with the type of space it really needs, but stadium events will compete with and detract from the existing convention uses if both are happening at the same time. Experts in stadium and convention facilities testifying recently at City Council hearings made clear that the multi-function facilities of the type proposed by the City do not work effectively and should be avoided.

We are also deeply concerned about the uncertain operational details of the combined facility at this late date. Agreement is still lacking on just how the facility will operate, how scheduling will take place and whether the Jets or the Convention Center will have first claim on space. The potential confusion arising from this complex arrangement does not augur well for the Javits Center.

We strongly oppose the construction of a stadium over the western rail yards whether linked to Javits or not. It is the wrong use for this extremely valuable waterfront site.

Adding traffic to that already coming from the West Side Highway, Lincoln Tunnel and the Port Authority Bus Terminal, a stadium will bring traffic nightmares when in use. It will endanger the health of our many seniors and others with breathing problems and immune deficiencies. Traffic congestion will endanger crucial NYC industries such as theaters and restaurants. When not in use, the stadium area will be desolate and will discourage badly needed residential and commercial development.

Financing the stadium puts at risk development scheduled for and needed by other parts of Manhattan and other boroughs. Public funds should not be used to subsidize construction of a stadium for the privately owned Jets when we have so many more pressing needs in our community - housing, schools, health care -- to name but a few.

We support reasonable development of residential and commercial buildings in the area, including significantly greater quantities of affordable, non-market rate, housing than currently proposed. We want our neighborhoods to continue to be diverse. We want the wide range of families we now have to be able to live here - firemen as well as stockbrokers, stagehands as well as lawyers.

We support access to the waterfront and the rapid creation of new parks and open spaces to help enhance the community and attract development. The open space now planned around the stadium is largely for crowd control for stadium events and not a real park.

We do not oppose a New York Olympics and agree with most experts that locating a stadium elsewhere would enhance the City's chances of winning the bid for 2012 or in any other year.

The process by which the proposal for Javits expansion and stadium construction has been conducted, as well as Hudson Yards in general, seems to have had one guiding principle-

release as little information as possible and minimize or even eliminate opportunities for public and legislative review.

The governor's initial program bill was regrettably a perfect example. It eliminated oversight by the state comptroller and severely limited the possibility of judicial review. The Convention Center Development Corporation (CCDC) was given unbridled authority to issue billions of dollars of bonds. Artful language was used to permit these funds to be used not only for true Javits expansion but for construction of the adjoining stadium as well. The ability of the CCDC to act on its own without further authorization put the Mortgage Insurance Fund and the State itself at financial risk.

The bill gave the Mayor and Governor the power to appoint a majority of CCDC directors, packing the board and throttling dissent. It exempted the project from state laws insuring fair bidding by firms maintaining proper labor standards and eliminated language insuring meaningful participation by minority individuals or businesses.

A storm of protest apparently forced the Governor to modify his bill in the last few days and remove some of the offensive provisions. However, few people have seen the new version and even fewer have had a chance to analyze it. We urge the Legislature to examine it carefully before acting. It is still a bad bill and needs major revision.

One key item apparently not fixed is the elimination of the Advisory Committee established in 1979 that includes representation for Community Board No. 4. It substitutes the much vaguer language on community role of Section 16 of the Urban Development Corporation Act which makes no reference to our Board.

Given the massive size and community impact of the Hudson Yards proposal including the Javits expansion and stadium, the creation of a dedicated community advisory board with mandated representation of Community Board No. 4 is extremely important. Our Board intimately knows our population and its needs. This was why the provisions were inserted in the 1979 legislation. This is why they must be maintained 25 years later.

Our position is not NIMBY. We support reasonable development of the Hudson Yards area. An ever growing list of highly respected organizations and experts share our views and are making their position public.

Press opponents of a West Side stadium include the New York Times, Newsday, NY Observer and many columnists and op-ed articles. Significantly, many of the strongest opponents are sportswriters who might be expected to support the stadium.

The stadium is opposed by many local elected officials including Council member Quinn, Assembly member Gottfried, State Senator Thomas Duane and Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum and Congressman Gerald Nadler

Negative opinions have been forthcoming from fiscal analysts at the Independent Budget Office, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Center for an Urban Future, the University

of Pennsylvania and countless other planning and development experts. Lastly, the NY Times reported that the Regional Plan Association staff had prepared a blistering critique of the heavily subsidized stadium, which the group's study paper suggested would "deter rather than attract the large-scale redevelopment" that the West Side needs and that the RPA had agreed to delay the release of the report following intense lobbying by Deputy Mayor Doctoroff.

There is a range of opinions in our community about the level of growth that is planned for our community in the next 40 years. Some may take to the streets - and maybe even the courts - to oppose all forms of development. Many will accept that change is inevitable, but will try to shape that change to take the community's needs into account. But there is consistent and widespread opposition in the community to a stadium, just as there is widespread support for a Javits expansion that is good for Javits. As for Community Board 4, we support rational, balanced development that will inure to the betterment of our area and the City as a whole.

Let me finish by asking you to reflect on what a stadium prevents us from doing. A stadium will block a precious waterfront site with what is the equivalent of a solid three-square block building 30 stories high extending over the West Side Highway and encroaching on the Hudson River Park. There are so many other things we can do with this site that will have lasting benefits for our community and all New Yorkers. Your committees can help by rejecting the undemocratic, stampeding tactics of the Governor, the Mayor and their representatives. Tell them to go back to the drawing board and come up with a real plan, one that can meet the test of openness and public review.