

# The Hudson Yards Community Advisory Committee

c/o Manhattan Community Board No. 4  
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New York, NY 10036

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October 1, 2008

Ann Weisbrod  
President  
Hudson Yards Development Corporation  
225 West 34th Street, Suite 1402  
New York, New York 10122

and

Marie L. Jean-Louis, P.E.  
NYC Department of Design and Construction  
Director Manhattan & Citywide Program Administration  
30-30 Thomson Avenue  
Long Island City, NY 11101

## **Re: Hudson Boulevard and Park Design Concepts**

Dear Ms. Weisbrod and Ms. Jean-Louis,

The Hudson Yards Community Advisory Committee (HYCAC), in concert with Manhattan Community Board 4 (CB4), has reviewed the design concepts presented by the five design teams vying to become the designated designer of the planned Hudson Boulevard and Park (the Park). The comments that follow are largely based on the presentations by the designers on September 22, 2008 and comments from the community from the same meeting as well as from a survey form given to community members at the meeting. We appreciate very much this opportunity to comment as we believe that a park for the current and future community that it will serve must be designed and developed with community involvement, and in that regard, we are off to a good start. It is our hope and expectation that this consultation will continue as the Park moves toward completion.

In general, all five presentations were well received. The designs for the boulevard and park concepts were often innovative, cutting edge and highly contemporary, many with sustainability in mind, some quite whimsical, and generally mindful of the tall physical environment that will surround the Park. However, our community places a higher value on program vs. pure design, and many of our comments will deal with practical matters and needs of the community that would apply no matter who is chosen. We feel that these issues and/or criteria, outlined below, should play an important part of the selection process.

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*The Hudson Yards Community Advisory Committee was formed pursuant to the agreement between the Administration and the City Council with respect to the Hudson Yards rezoning in January 2005 to advise the Hudson Yards Development Corporation regarding the financing, planning, design and construction of the Hudson Yards redevelopment area from a neighborhood perspective. Its members include representatives of Manhattan Community Board 4, the area's local elected officials and several local organizations. For more information, see <http://www.manhattancb4.org/HKHY/docs/HYCACstructure.htm>.*

While we appreciated the ingenuity and imagination expressed by many of the proposals, the ideas were too ambitious and crowded, trying to do too much in a limited amount of spaces. Several of the presentations showed elaborate bridge structures in the northern sections that we felt were impractical and not likely to be built. Therefore, we tended to focus instead on the landscape components of the southern six blocks. A theme that will be repeated in several comments below is to keep it simple, practical and useful.

### **Connectivity, Integration and the Bigger Picture**

Many of the designs integrated the streets running east and west into the design and we feel that this is an important consideration, as many visitors to the park will approach it via the cross-streets. It will also be important for this boulevard/park to relate closely with the rail yards just to the south, as well as with the nearby Hudson River Park. Finally, it will be important to understand that, in addition to future planned residential and commercial development, there is already a significant population in the area that is lacking in everyday park facilities.

### **Traffic and Safety**

The park (or series of parks) will be separated by east/west streets and we are concerned about the safety of pedestrians crossing from one park to another. Some of the designs indicated park paths that crossed the streets between boulevard crossings, an idea that should be avoided. Park paths should terminate at the corners when they intersect a street.

But we are even more concerned about how the north/south “boulevard” roadways will impact the parks. We understand that, from the beginning, this has always been planned as an automobile boulevard surrounding a series of parks. Our understanding is that these new roadways are not intended to be major north/south thoroughfares, but rather meant primarily to service the residential and commercial developments that surround the Park. These roadways should be designed to minimize traffic; indeed, one of the frequent comments at the public forum was “Why have any roadways at all?” Consideration should be given to road surfaces that encourage low speeds and that could be converted into pedestrian-only walkways on weekends. The use of the roadways by trucks should be discouraged.

### **Location - Park in a Canyon - Lighting**

Clearly this will be a park surrounded by tall buildings, and this will create challenges to ensure it does not become a dark, cold shaded series of spaces. From the presentations, it was difficult to get a real understanding of the impact of the surrounding buildings on the park and how to relate them to human scale. Two teams suggested the use of mirrors to reflect afternoon sunlight into the Park and this idea may hold promise. Overall, lightning will be important issue that needs careful consideration.

### **Uses for the Community – Models**

As all the designers stated, this park will serve both commercial buildings as well as a growing residential community. This implies a range of uses, including small playing fields, playgrounds

for children, a big open lawn and quiet areas as well as areas for active uses. Hell's Kitchen Park should be looked at as a model for many uses, as well as Madison Square. Again, less emphasis on design and more on usability should be the guiding principle, as well as flexibility so that changing use needs over time can be accommodated. Keep it simple and useful.

### **Reality, Maintenance and Practicality**

One concern about the design concepts presented was how easily they could be maintained over time, or how expensive they would be. While water features were well received, complex water-play fountains all too often fall into disrepair and become eyesores.

### **Operations & Security**

There was consensus that these parks must be open and not fenced in, as some city parks are. The parks should be open 24 hours.

### **Comfort and Image – Surfaces and Plantings**

There was a strong feeling the Park should have predominately soft surfaces such as grass as opposed to hard plazas. Trees, in particular trees native to the area, can be used to advantage, not only to create a live “green” feeling, but also to help unify the parks with the surrounding streets. At the same time, consideration should be given as to how to make the park as useful in winter as it is in other parts of the year.

### **Concessions and Necessary Facilities**

Given that the park will be closely surrounded by retail on the east and west borders, and given the relatively small areas available for park use, we strongly urge that any buildings in the park itself be avoided. Food, beverages and the like can easily be provided within the retail portions of the building. The idea of incorporating public rest rooms into the surrounding buildings should also be considered.

We have no comment on just what the subway entrance should look like, recognizing the early nature of the design process at this stage, although the bubble-like entrance in one proposal was mentioned favorably, as was the idea of a subway entrance with a green planted roof.

### **Sustainability and Use of Water**

Several designs indicated various type of water features which were favorably received, and several proposed rainwater retention as a sustainable feature. Again, any such systems or features must be simple and cost-effective.

### **Development Considerations – Effect on Uses**

It appears that the southern three segments will be the most likely to be built, while there are doubts about the northern three. This will affect usability decisions, as most of the designs

anticipate residential users in the northern three parks and commercial office building users in the southern three. It will be important that the southern three are able to serve residential users as well as office workers in the initial planning. In other words, the design of the southern three needs to consider the possibility that the northern three may never be built, or may not be built for several years.

## **Selection**

The community's reaction to the five design proposals was mixed. There was no clear favorite, and each of the proposals drew favorable comment to varying degrees. We also recognize that our review has been necessarily superficial, and that other factors such as engineering and project management capabilities and financial feasibility must also be considered in selecting a design team. Having said that, when measured against the criteria outlined above, we can say that there is a consensus that the approach presented by the Gustafson Guthrie Nichol Ltd. team may provide the best overall starting point for this process. We also appreciated the attention to program of the Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Inc. Landscape Architects team as well as the strong focus on ecology and sustainability, coupled by imaginative visions, expressed by the Work Architecture Company team. In the end, though, we would be pleased to work with any of the five teams.

## **Conclusion**

HYCAC and CB4 are generally pleased with the process as it has developed, and we hope our comments will be useful, not only in the selection of the design team, but as the beginning of what we feel will be an important dialog as this project moves forward. In the end, it will not only be the design that marks the creation of a great new park, but also the interaction between the Park's developer and the community of individuals that the park is being built for.

Sincerely,



Anna Hayes Levin, Chair

C.c.  
NYC Department of Transportation  
NYC Department of Parks and Recreation  
NYC Department of City Planning  
Speaker Christine Quinn  
Senator Thomas Duane  
Congressman Jerrold Nadler  
Assembly member Richard Gottfried  
Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer