



**Testimony of New York City Council Member Corey Johnson  
before the City Planning Commission**

**Wednesday, August 24, 2016**

I want to thank the City Planning Commission and the Hudson River Park Trust for this opportunity to submit testimony regarding the redevelopment of the St. John's Terminal Building at 550 Washington Street, the creation of the Hudson River Park Special District and the proposed transfer of air rights from Pier 40 in Hudson River Park.

With the participation of the Department of City Planning and this Commission, Community Boards, the Borough President, the City Council and the Mayor, the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure is designed to ensure that land use applications receive full public review and, ultimately, result in projects that produce true public value. The City Council plays an extremely important role in this process, and this is a responsibility I take very seriously.

The challenges facing all parties involved in this ULURP include producing an application that funds the urgently needed repairs to Pier 40, providing an ample number of desperately needed affordable apartments for middle and working class New Yorkers, mitigating the project's impacts and achieving a design that weaves this development into the surrounding neighborhood.

My colleagues in government and I have laid out many of the concerns we have about this application. Our concerns include, but are not limited to, the layout of the buildings, the amount of parking proposed, the proposed size and location of affordable units, the proposed layout of open space and the proposed inclusion of 'big box' retail as part of this plan.

During the City Council's review of this application, I look forward to hearing solutions from the applicant that address these concerns. I will not approve a project that does not adequately serve the needs of the community I was elected to represent.

It is also critical at this juncture to identify measures that the City and the Hudson River Park Trust must undertake to make this a viable project for the community. This is the focus of my testimony before you today.

**The City of New York must make a capital contribution to the preservation of Pier 40.** While the 550 Washington Street proposal would allow for the transfer of \$100 million

to Pier 40, significant unfunded capital needs would persist even following the infusion from the private transaction contemplated by the proposed project. According to the Hudson River Park Trust, in addition to the piling repairs, necessary repairs include electrical work, artificial field replacement and fire sprinkler repair. The Trust estimates the immediate-term needs (through year four) to be \$21,541,300.

The existence of Hudson River Park alone has increased neighboring property values, and thus earned the City added tax revenue. I would also note that New York City recently invested hundreds of millions of dollars in other parks around the City, and rightly so. These investments include \$50 million for a proposed indoor pool on Staten Island and \$307 million for Governors Island. Investing in these vital community resources is a noble cause, and I mention these examples only to point out that Hudson River Park, which hosts 17 million people annually, is equally worthy of City investment.

**The City of New York must extend the South Village Historic District.** Residents of the South Village honor the historical and cultural significance that has made their neighborhood a world-class destination. They also reasonably fear that their quality of life and the character of their neighborhood will suffer from further escalating development in the coming years.

If we are to approve the 550 Washington Street application, the City must also extend landmark protections to the historic blocks south of Houston Street. A southward extension of the South Village Historic District will give his historic neighborhood the protections it deserves, ensuring that any new structures are contextual, regulated and reasonably sized. The South Village is a neighborhood with a rich history and well deserving of this status, and such a designation will ensure that it is protected for future generations.

**The City of New York must conduct a comprehensive transportation study, concurrently with this ULURP, to provide recommendations for improving traffic and pedestrian safety conditions in the area surrounding 550 Washington Street.** Currently, traffic and pedestrian safety conditions in the area are severely lacking. Mainly because of the nearby entrance to the Holland Tunnel, Varick Street, Canal Street, West Street and Spring Street are all in a state of constant traffic gridlock. This creates adverse conditions for pedestrians, local residents, businesses, emergency response vehicles, and countless motorists every day. The creation of the proposed development at 550 Washington Street will bring increased vehicular traffic to the neighborhood, which threatens to exacerbate these problems.

For this reason, the New York City Department of Transportation must conduct a rigorous transportation study of the area, concurrently with this ULURP, so that concrete measures to address these problems can be proposed and enacted. Furthermore, the City must make a firm commitment at the outset of this project to improve conditions by implementing many tools in the City's existing repertoire, such as planted medians, special signage and curb extensions, among others. This is rightly called for in Manhattan Community Board 2's resolution on this application, and it is one of my top priorities.

**Hudson River Park Trust must submit a plan for the future use and development of Pier 40.** With the extraordinary amount of resources that are being invested in Pier 40, and the effects that the air rights transfer associated with this project will have, the public is entitled to a full account of the Trust's plans for the future of Pier 40. This includes any plans for use of the pier by the public, as well as any of the pier's anticipated needs in terms of capital improvements in the foreseeable future. The draft framework for Pier 40 development criteria contained in Manhattan Community Board 2's resolution from July of this year provides a good basis for this discussion.

**There must be a ban on further air rights transfers from Hudson River Park into the Manhattan Community Board 2 catchment area.** The Trust's ability to earn income from the transfer of air rights was specifically bestowed for the purpose of ensuring that the Trust is able to afford the expenses of major capital projects, namely the restoration of Pier 40. The 550 Washington Street proposal ensures this outcome through unprecedented density. It would be inappropriate for the Trust to further earn revenue through the transfer of air rights from Hudson River Park to Community Board 2, and such a transfer would place an unfair burden on the community.

Furthermore, the geographic nexus for the Hudson River Park Trust's ability to transfer air rights must be tightened to ensure that all future receiving sites are both within one half mile of the granting site and within the same community board. This is in keeping with the spirit of air rights transfers and it would ensure that the same community is weighing the positive and negative aspects of such a transfer for both the granting site and the receiving site.

Thank you again for the opportunity to deliver this testimony. This is an important project that must be executed with high deference to public good for the sake of our City's continued growth and success. I look forward to the Commission's report and to continuing this conversation when ULURP brings this application before the City Council. Thank you.

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