



RPA Report Outlines Strategy for Success on the Far West Side

*Position paper supports most elements of City/State plan,
proposes new phased approach and opposes NY Sports and Convention Center*

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NEW YORK – Regional Plan Association (RPA) today released a position paper outlining the organization’s strategy for creating a vibrant new mixed-use district on the Far West Side of Midtown Manhattan. The report supports much of the ambitious City/State proposal for remaking the underutilized area, but recommends a revised phasing strategy and alternative uses for the proposed stadium site on the Western Yards.

RPA calls for a three-phased strategy intended to maximize the strengths and minimize the risks of the City’s Hudson Yards proposal. The report recommends moving forward immediately with the proposed rezoning, northern expansion of the Javits Convention Center, initial public space improvements and creation of an alternative plan for the Western Yards. These actions would allow for immediate residential development to meet market demand, especially in the eastern portion of the district. A second phase would begin in 2010 and include construction of the #7 subway extension, investments in preparing the rail yards for development and implementation of the City’s open space network proposal, as well as completion of the second phase of the Javits expansion. These investments would provide the capacity for commercial growth as demand develops after much of the city’s current inventory of vacant office space is occupied. A final phase would commence around 2016 and include the second stop on the #7 extension and decking of the Lincoln tunnel “spaghetti” infrastructure that blights part of the district. This would allow for development in the northern portion of the district.

“There is an urgency to get started on the Far West Side so that the positive momentum generated by the City and State’s tremendous effort is not lost,” said Robert D. Yaro, President of RPA. “But the demand for commercial development isn’t there yet, and rushing the major infrastructure investments will only compete with the recovery of Lower Manhattan and put the City at unnecessary fiscal risk.”

“RPA is an organization that supports ambitious public projects, and the report puts forward a positive vision for re-making the Far West Side,” said Peter W. Herman, Chairman of RPA. “It is only with great reluctance that we oppose parts of the plan, but history has shown that most successful redevelopment plans are flexible enough to evolve and adapt to changes. Removing the stadium should make it more likely, not less, that the overall vision will be implemented.”

Over the long-term, a key to the strategy is replacement of the proposed Jets stadium with a mixed-use alternative that will provide better waterfront access and increase the likelihood of development in the rest of the district.

“The Jets and the City have done an admirable job of trying to tame the stadium, but at the end of the day its construction still conflicts with the long-term goals for the West Side,” said RPA Board member Barbara Joelson Fife, a former Deputy Mayor of New York City. “Access to the waterfront is too important to the future of the City and the Far West Side to construct such an immense barrier in a prime location.”

The RPA report bases its findings on longstanding regional development principles that call for focusing dense, high-value activities in the region’s urban core.

“From a regional standpoint, the continued growth and prosperity of Manhattan’s economy is crucial,” said Matthew S. Kissner, RPA Vice Chairman and Executive Vice President of Pitney Bowes. “The strategy that RPA has identified grows this invaluable asset without risking damage to the overall economy by undermining Lower Manhattan or other regional business districts.”

The position paper was released after a year of research and analysis, including the organization’s annual Regional Assembly in April and the release of three research papers earlier in the year. The process also included an unprecedented level of input from the RPA Board of Directors, a 56-member body that represents the region’s diversity of professions, places and interests.

“While not everyone on the Board agreed with every aspect of RPA’s position on the Far West Side, that’s to be expected with such a large and diverse group,” said Claude Shostal, President Emeritus of RPA and a current Board member. “In the end, though, the Board upheld 80 years of tradition and overwhelmingly supported release of a position paper that will elevate the public debate on this vital issue.”

Regional Plan Association (RPA) is an independent regional planning organization that improves the quality of life and the economic competitiveness of the 31-county New York-New Jersey-Connecticut region through research, planning, and advocacy. Since 1922, RPA has been shaping transportation systems, protecting open spaces, and promoting better community design for the region’s continued growth. We anticipate the challenges the region will face in the years to come, and we mobilize the region’s civic, business, and government sectors to take action. For more information about Regional Plan Association, please visit our website, www.rpa.org.

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