

Board + Officers

Kent Barwick
Paula Caplan
Franny Eberhart
Alex Garvin
Michael S. Gruen, President
Jane Gullong
Jeffrey Kroessler
Stephen Raphael
Carole Rifkind
Juan Rivero
Frank Sanchis
Ross Sandler
Brendan Sexton
Bruce Simon
E. Gail Suchman, Treasurer

Revised 11 May 2016

3 May 2016

Statement of the City Club of New York

Re: Water Street POPS Proposed Rezoning

The City of New York proposes to amend the Special Lower Manhattan District of the Zoning Resolution to facilitate the infill of existing bonused arcades with retail space in exchange for improvements to adjacent plazas and other open spaces. The text provides that the construction of enclosed retail space in an existing arcade would not count as zoning floor area and that the reduction in the area of the bonused arcade would not result in a reduction in the permitted floor area of the building. The perceived problem is that the arcades are not of public benefit and that the plazas and other public open spaces need improvement.

The City Club is concerned that the benefits to the private sector through this amendment seem to exceed the benefits to the public. The proposal appears to sacrifice open space to solve a problem that may be either non-existent or easily solved through better maintenance, enforcement, and programming. The lack of adequate specifics on the proposal, however, makes a proper evaluation of the proposal's merits impossible. Accordingly, we recommend rejection of the proposal until the following analyses and stipulations are provided.

- An analysis of the maintenance, amenities, streetscape, fronting uses, and patterns of use of the streets, parks, plazas, and arcades along and near Water Street including recommendations as to how these public spaces could work better individually and collectively. (Some of these spaces seem to work well; others would benefit from programming, enforcement, and maintenance.)
- An appraisal of the financial benefit that would be realized by building owners.

Policy Council

Kent L. Barwick
Albert K. Butzel
Bill Donohoe
Andrew Dolkart
Franny Eberhart
Richard Emery
Jasper Goldman
Michael S. Gruen
Ian Kelley
Jeffrey Kroessler
Michael Kwartler
John Low-Beer
Jonathan Marvel
David Nissenbaum
Joanna Pertz
Stephen Raphael
Juan Rivero
Ross Sandler
Bruce H. Simon
E. Gail Suchman
John Pettit West, III
J. Mike Zee

- A comprehensive and detailed urban design streetscape plan for all of Water Street that specifies the proposed improvements to the public realm and their cost so that these may be measured against the proposed concessions to property owners and serve as a guide for approvals by the City. (Legally, we believe, there must be “rough proportionality” between the quid and the quo; between the benefit to the public as opposed to the benefit to the property owner.)
- An analysis of changes to pedestrian circulation resulting from: (a) changes to uses in existing buildings, (b) development of new buildings, (c) construction of improvements along the waterfront, and (d) circulation to and from future stations of the Second Avenue subway.
- A plan for flood protection showing how changes to public spaces in the Water Street area contribute to its effectiveness.
- An assessment of the value of lost shaded spaces, particularly arcades and covered pedestrian spaces, especially given expected increases in the frequency of extreme heat events and the desirability of weather protection in inclement weather.
- Stipulations that ensure that the revenues generated by the certifications and authorizations will be devoted exclusively to mitigating the effects of the reduction of density ameliorating bonused open space through improvements to the neighborhood’s public realm.
- Provisions for taking into account the advice of the community board, the local expert on its neighborhood’s urban design.

Absent the information that these analyses and stipulations would provide it is questionable whether the Environmental Assessment Statement prepared for the proposed changes to the Special Lower Manhattan District supports the Negative Declaration that was issued.

The City Club desires that the Water Street area be all that it can be. It seeks not to delay consummation but to ensure the best possible result.