

DUMBO NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION
TESTIMONY BEFORE BOROUGH PRESIDENT MARKOWITZ
RE: 85 JAY STREET REZONING

SEPTEMBER 1, 2004

At over 3 acres, the 85 Jay Street parcel is one of the largest pieces of undeveloped land in New York City. It occupies a critical location in DUMBO, directly across from the York Street station, the major gateway to our neighborhood. Development of this parcel will have a tremendous effect on DUMBO and deserves thoughtful consideration.

Over the past year, DUMBO Neighborhood Association has consistently expressed two main concerns with the 85 Jay project as presented by the applicant. These, in brief, are: #1. the lack of street level retail deactivates the Jay, Bridge, York and Front streetscapes — the future heart of our neighborhood; and #2. at 14, 16, 18 and 20 stories the towers are too tall and are out of context with the current built environment of DUMBO. These concerns remain, and we will address each in turn.

First, it is a long held urban planning principle that commercial activity should be clustered around transportation nodes, such as subway stations, and we believe street level retail or other active uses are essential to the well-being and character of our neighborhood. Indeed, the "Old Brooklyn District" 197-A plan, developed in 1999 by Community Board 2 and neighborhood stakeholders, calls for mixed-use zoning, with consequent vibrant and dynamic streets, in DUMBO.

We presented our concern about the lack of street level retail to the Witnesses. Though we were disappointed with their response, we appreciated the constraints on commercial activity, which are based upon principles held within the Society's charter. We further suggested the Witnesses could sell space as commercial condominiums, thereby not compromising their charter. Again, the Witnesses declined. So while we do not oppose a rezoning of the parcel to residential use, we feel that significant improvements to the infrastructure of DUMBO are called for as mitigation for the passive face the development will present to the neighborhood.

These improvements are intended to help activate our streets and to support the historic and artistic character of DUMBO. They include: #1. rehabilitation to Bridge Park 2 on

York Street including ongoing maintenance, #2. rehabilitation of the York Street Station, including capital funds for an Arts in Transit program, #3. restoration of our Belgian Block streets for the entire of DUMBO, and #4. installation of a lighting program, with historic streetlamps, for the entire of DUMBO including the Water Street underpass. We note that as a religious organization, the Witnesses do not pay property taxes, and as such do not contribute to our roads, schools, parks, etc. These improvements are their opportunity to make that contribution, just as they do in Wallkill, NY, their upstate site.

Our second major concern is the size of the development. The Witnesses have proposed towers of 14, 16, 18 and 20 stories. These are too large and are out of scale with the current built context of DUMBO, whose industrial buildings top out at around 12 stories, and Vinegar Hill which is composed primarily of 3-4 story brownstones. We suggest instead a zoning district of MX-R6A to maintain consistency with the existing streetscapes.

In addition to our major concerns above, we have the following requests. We ask Borough Hall to call for a restrictive declaration requiring that the project design be consistent with the existing industrial buildings of DUMBO in terms of fenestration and materials and that the development remain a series of buildings rather than a single, massive structure. While most of this appears in the conceptual drawing by Beyer, Blinder, Belle, we would like to ensure it is carried out. We ask that the loading dock for the development be moved from Front to York Street. To facilitate traffic flow, we support making Jay Street two-way. And we ask the Witnesses to enlarge the four 500 square foot green spaces surrounding the project and not enclosing them behind fencing.

In conclusion, let me summarize the major points. DUMBO Neighborhood Association does not oppose the rezoning of the 85 Jay Street parcel for residential use. However, we ask for significant infrastructure improvements to the neighborhood as mitigation for the lack of street level retail and we call for the heights of the towers to be lowered to MX-R6A zoning and made consistent with the existing streetscapes. We ask Borough Hall to include these conditions in their recommendation.

Finally, we look forward to continuing dialogue with the Witnesses. The 85 Jay Street project will have a tremendous impact on DUMBO. We trust we can work together to make that impact a positive one.



Nancy Webster
President
DUMBO Neighborhood Association