

DUMBO CONTEXTUAL REZONING PROPOSAL - SUMMARY

The overall goal of the DUMBO Neighborhood Association's *DUMBO Rezoning Examination and Proposal* is singular: to rezone the remainder of the greater DUMBO area in an appropriate manner that will encourage contextual development while protecting the air, light and space that is enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

The study area, bounded by Doughty Street on the west; the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway and York Street on the south; the Brooklyn Navy Yard on the east; and the East River on the north, encompasses all or parts of 45 blocks in the Fulton Ferry, DUMBO and Vinegar Hill neighborhoods of Brooklyn.

The Basics:

Our urban planning consultant, Paul Graziano, collected data in the study area by cross-referencing current indicators of land use, including existing zoning; heights of buildings, shadow studies and view corridors; historic districts; remaining industry; designated parkland; unprotected open space; and soft spots (those parcels of land that are easily or most likely to be redeveloped with new/high-rise construction). While each of those indicators is important by themselves, it is how they interact, or overlay with each other that is critical in coming up with a comprehensive plan for the area.

Height of Buildings: By looking at the prevailing heights of buildings in the DUMBO area, it is clear that the vast majority are eight stories or less. While there are clusters of nine to twelve-story buildings, particularly in proximity to the Manhattan Bridge, and isolated buildings over twelve stories (including those by the Manhattan Bridge anchorage), more than two-thirds of the study area has either vacant parcels (including parkland); mostly vacant parcels (for example, properties used as parking lots with a small building on-site); or buildings eight stories or less (approximately 60% below four stories and 40% above).

Historic Districts: There are now three New York City landmark historic districts in the area: DUMBO, Fulton Ferry and Vinegar Hill. While these districts protect a significant portion of these neighborhoods from indiscriminate demolitions and alterations, many of the sites that are easily redeveloped in the study area are outside of the historic districts. Additionally, there are buildings within the historic districts which are given a "no style" designation. These buildings can be demolished with the approval of the Landmarks Preservation Commission and replaced with much larger, denser and taller buildings.

Industry: While there is still small-scale industrial, warehouse and light manufacturing operations in Fulton Ferry and (particularly) the eastern portion of DUMBO and Vinegar Hill, these concerns are threatened – as are the jobs that they create – by a proposal to extend the MX Zoning District from other parts of DUMBO. This mixed-use residential/industrial designation will drive up the square foot price of the properties in question and result, as has been seen in other parts of DUMBO and Williamsburg and Greenpoint, in a precipitous decline of industrial usage, with a net loss of jobs from the area.

Parkland: Much of the waterfront has been designated parkland; however, there are parcels which are planned to include new high-rise residential development within the park itself. One parcel targeted for this use is the Con Edison property at John Street between Adams and Jay streets.

Undeveloped property / soft spots: Besides the Con Edison property discussed above, there are also several large undeveloped properties in DUMBO, including the entire block bounded by York, Bridge, Front and Jay streets, and the triangular parking lot at York and Front streets adjacent to the Brooklyn Bridge anchorage and 70 Washington Street. Additionally, several "soft spots" or easily redevelopable sites – including the proposed Dock Street development – are located throughout all three neighborhoods.

The Solutions:

Height of Buildings: Height – and the resulting bulk, shadows and view corridors that correspond to the built environment of a particular building – cannot be overemphasized as being the most important issue in any rezoning or development proposal. The two actions that are in play today – the proposed Dock Street development – Certified by the Department of City Planning in mid-November with public hearing scheduled for December 17th, 2008 at Community Board 2 – and the City Planning-initiated proposed rezoning of ten blocks of DUMBO east of the Manhattan Bridge have one thing in common: both proposals would allow out-of-scale development in DUMBO. Additionally, the proposed Dock Street development would have a deleterious effect on the “Bowl” of the Brooklyn Bridge, a design that was purposefully created by its designers to enhance the Brooklyn approach of the bridge. No building within proximity of the Brooklyn Bridge is higher than its walkway.

The DUMBO Neighborhood Association proposal recommends that any development at the Dock Street site also be no higher than the Brooklyn Bridge walkway, or 75 feet in height. Additionally, all new development should be contextual in nature in Fulton Ferry, DUMBO and Vinegar Hill. This includes the introduction of the R6B zone in Fulton Ferry (maximum height: 50’); the R6A zone (maximum height: 70’), R7A zone (maximum height: 80’) and R8A zone (maximum height: 120’) where appropriate in DUMBO (see map); and the R6B zone in Vinegar Hill.

Historic Districts: The DUMBO, Fulton Ferry and Vinegar Hill historic districts are all near each other, but don’t actually touch. There are gaps – buildings and sites that were declined protection due to their lack of landmark quality – that has created large-scale development opportunities. Additionally, the proposed Dock Street development is adjacent to three historically designated structures or areas: the Brooklyn Bridge – a National Historic Landmark and Monument and New York City landmark - on the west; Fulton Ferry Historic District (National, State and New York City historic district) – and the Empire Stores – on the north; and the DUMBO Historic District (National, State and New York City historic district) on the east.

The DUMBO Neighborhood Association’s proposal calls on the Landmarks Preservation Commission and the State Historic Preservation Office to respond to possible negative repercussions of the proposed Dock Street development on the Brooklyn Bridge and surrounding historic districts. Additionally, several buildings that have been designated as “no style” should be reconsidered in order to better reinforce the historic fabric of DUMBO.

Industry: Retention of the remaining industry – much of it arts-oriented – in DUMBO, Fulton Ferry and Vinegar Hill will be all but impossible if a mixed-use zoning district is implemented under the Department of City Planning’s proposal.

The DUMBO Neighborhood Association’s proposal calls for any rezoning from a manufacturing to a mixed-use zone be coupled with a mandatory “Inclusionary Industrial” zone that will help retain industry on the first floor of buildings within the proposed rezoning area and help in the relocation process for other industry to nearby industrial areas in Brooklyn.

Parkland: Designated parkland in Fulton Ferry, DUMBO and Vinegar Hill is mostly located along the East River. However, there are other designated parcels along the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway and Brooklyn Bridge approaches that are being used as parking lots.

The DUMBO Neighborhood Association’s proposal calls for no private development of the Con Edison property at John Street. Additionally, the other designated parcels should be returned to official park usage.

Undeveloped property / soft spots: While only the proposed Dock Street development is currently being planned, the York / Front streets parking lot is zoned ‘as-of-right’ for large-scale residential development (R7-1), as is the ‘superblock’ on the east side of Jay Street (R8) and can be redeveloped at any time.

The DUMBO Neighborhood Association’s proposal calls for all three parcels to be comprehensively rezoned to lower contextual zoning designations (R6A, R7A and R8A). Additionally, the York / Front streets parking lot – which is located in the ‘bowl’ of the Brooklyn Bridge - should be acquired by New York City for a park and / or public school.