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## CHPC Statement on Hudson Yards Redevelopment Program September 23, 2004

The Hudson Yards project represents one of the most ambitious planning efforts New York City has undertaken in many years. When complete, the Far West Side of Manhattan will be entirely recreated as home to 30,000 new residents and 200,000 new workers. If done correctly, it could help to ensure the future vitality of Midtown Manhattan as well as the continued economic preeminence of the New York metropolitan area. CHPC recognizes both the local and regional importance of the Hudson Yards project and congratulates the Mayor's Office, the Department of City Planning, and the MTA for their bold vision and imaginative planning efforts.

CHPC strongly supports the redevelopment of the Far West Side of Manhattan. We are inspired by the comprehensive nature of the Hudson Yards Plan and are appreciative of the efforts Deputy Mayor Doctoroff and Commissioner Burden, Chair of the City Planning Commission, have made to present and explain the plan to the public. We are, however, seriously concerned about four critical aspects of the plan – zoning, design, housing, and transportation. In each of these four areas, CHPC has a long and unique history of bringing together public and private sector interests to encourage sound economic development strategies, livable communities, and equitable planning outcomes. It is our sincere belief that all of these goals can be attained in redeveloping the Far West Side of Manhattan. The following is a discussion of each of the four aspects of the plan where CHPC feels further action is necessary.

### Zoning

The first crucial task in transforming what is now a moribund manufacturing district into a thriving, mixed-use extension of the nation's largest central business district is to establish zoning codes that effectively regulate use and design. The Hudson Yards Plan is extremely inventive in the way it links zoning density to infrastructure financing, combines residential and commercial development with open space, and encourages affordable housing. Nevertheless, we have strong concerns about the rigidity of the land use plan and whether it will be able to accommodate the unpredictable changes in market conditions and user needs that will invariably occur over the next quarter century.

CHPC concurs with the City that a future build-out of approximately 28 million square feet of new commercial space and 12 million square feet of new residential space currently represent an acceptable mix. Unfortunately, portions of the proposed zoning are inadequate in their ability to accommodate a modified mix of commercial and residential space as future market needs are revealed. For instance, in Subdistricts A-2 and A-3 proposed zoning allows 4.0 residential FAR only after a development attains at least 20.0 commercial FAR. The problem lies in the expectation

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that 20.0 commercial FAR will be viable. If sufficient demand for commercial space fails to materialize, residential uses will be eliminated from Hudson Boulevard as well. A worst case scenario could result in the absence of any new development, thus undermining financing, transportation, and incremental design elements of the entire plan.

To ensure this scenario does not occur, CHPC strongly suggests a seven-year sunset on the residential restrictions in the C6-4 zones in Subdistricts A, B, and E. After a period of seven years from the passage of the current proposed zoning text, special C6-4 zones in these three subdistricts within the Special Hudson Yards District would be reassessed or revert to a standard variant of C6-4 zoning. A seven-year sunset also allows for the resolution of other major components of the plan, including the expansion of the Javits Convention Center, the status of the proposed multi-use facility, and the development of the transportation infrastructure. Inclusion of such a device is advantageous from both a regulatory and a development perspective and will ensure flexibility in a plan with a 30-year horizon.

## **Design**

CHPC has two principal concerns regarding the urban design components of the Hudson Yards Plan. The first concern is in regards to waterfront access, or the lack thereof. As the plan is currently laid out, significant impediments to waterfront access exist. In the past twenty years, New York City has been diligent in its desire to reclaim its urban waterfront. By the time the Hudson Yards District is completely built, Manhattan will be ringed by parkland, trails, and public access to its waterfront. Unfortunately, the current plan does not maximize waterfront access. A combined Sports and Convention Center would occupy 12 city blocks between Eleventh and Twelfth Avenues with only one throughway to the waterfront, at 34th Street. Because of security concerns it is questionable whether 34th Street will even be open during major events, further limiting access. This lack of waterfront access will be a deterrent to residents, workers, tourists, as well as commuters trying to access the West Midtown Ferry Terminal.

Our second major concern involves the streetscape on Eleventh Avenue. As currently planned, there will be no retail uses on Eleventh Avenue. With commercial street walls soaring in excess of 100 feet on the east side of Eleventh Avenue and the Javits Convention Center lining the west side of the street, a sterile and glazed canyon will be created. Even if it is anticipated that convention-goers will access retail uses along Hudson Boulevard, there will still be a need to make Eleventh Avenue more inviting. A minimum 50% retail requirement would allow for the possibility of small-scale theatres, museums, or other uses to benefit convention-goers and/or convention workers. In addition, by encouraging street traffic, it will prevent an inhospitable Eleventh Avenue from detracting from the entire district.

CHPC believes multiple expansion options for the Javits Convention Center should be explored. Option that not only enhance waterfront access, but also increase ferry linkages between the new 39th Street Terminal and the commercial core, will be beneficial to the City. Implementing design controls on Eleventh Avenue must also be considered in the context of the proposed expansion and redesign of the Javits Convention Center. We believe that both of these design issues require revisions to the plan and if implemented, will help ensure to the long-term success of the district.

## **Housing**

Development of new housing is one of the critical components of the Hudson Yards Plan, and will contribute to making the Far West Side a lively and integral part of Manhattan. The new housing will help to satisfy the substantial demand for housing in the borough, and will help offset some of the increased housing demand that will result from the planned commercial development. However, CHPC believes that the plans for the Hudson Yards should include a more explicit plan for providing mixed income housing through zoning bonuses, tax incentives, and direct subsidies. We believe that by enabling approximately one-third of the new housing units to be affordable to individuals or families who will not be able to obtain new market rate housing, the Hudson Yards

can be made into a more interesting, cohesive, and successful neighborhood.

We are pleased to see that the plan incorporates inclusionary housing density bonuses as a central part of zoning regulations in the area. We believe that inclusionary housing is a technique that can be used more widely throughout the city, and the provision for it in the Hudson Yards Plan importantly symbolizes New York's commitment to fostering mixed-income communities. Moreover, the city should take this opportunity to address a number of shortcomings in the current inclusionary zoning provisions, including the absence of an inclusionary option for condominium development.

We do not believe that inclusionary zoning will be sufficient, however, to achieve the optimal income mix in a new Hudson Yards neighborhood. We anticipate that among other measures the city will extend the 421-a exclusion zone to cover the majority of the potential residential sites in the area, thereby encouraging 80-20 developments, and will allocate tax-exempt financing to facilitate the construction of those buildings. CHPC has maintained that more flexibility should be built into the 421-a program, and the Hudson Yards would be an ideal context in which to consider that. In addition, we urge the relevant agencies to immediately identify publicly owned sites in the area that can be reserved for future affordable housing development and to allocate sufficient subsidy funds in its long-term budget plans to ensure that those and other suitable sites can be developed. Allocating approximately \$200 million over the next ten years for affordable housing in the Hudson Yards area, to be spent through existing or customized HPD programs, is essential to facilitate the development of housing affordable to middle-income households thus materially reducing the constant shortfall of such housing in New York City.

## **Transportation**

Transportation improvements are perhaps the centerpiece of the entire Hudson Yards Plan. CHPC endorses the planned extension of the No. 7 Subway Line and its proposed route, which will maximize access to the Hudson Yards district. We also support the construction of a new station at 41st Street and Tenth Avenue; although, we have misgivings about the proposed timetable. There has been considerable discussion about the timing for construction of the station at 41st Street and Tenth Avenue. As currently planned, the station will be constructed in 2015 when sufficient development in the northwest quadrant of the Hudson Yards District materializes. CHPC strongly questions this strategy and urges the City to move aggressively to establish all of the necessary transportation infrastructure.

While extension of the No. 7 Subway Line is a necessary and needed improvement, it will not be enough to handle expected flows of residents, visitors, and workers at full build-out. By 2030, the Hudson Yards district will generate approximately 65,000 additional daily commuter trips into the city. At least 25 percent of those commuters will come from west of the Hudson River. With current rail capacity under the Hudson River expected to reach capacity by 2009, it is essential that trans-Hudson commuter capacity be expanded. It is troubling that the Hudson Yards Plan has been virtually silent on the issue.

One major initiative to do this is "Access to the Region's Core." The initiative is a joint Port Authority/New Jersey Transit project to increase commuter rail capacity, possibly including the construction of a new rail tunnel under the Hudson River. Such a connection will increase development potential and must be considered in conjunction with the Hudson Yards Plan. A second major undertaking currently underway is the construction of the West Midtown Ferry Terminal. Ferry service represents a quick and inexpensive supplement to trans-Hudson service. Making access to the new West Midtown Ferry Terminal more pedestrian friendly and creating better linkages between the service and the existing transportation system is essential. CHPC urges the City to integrate both of these transportation initiatives into the Hudson Yards Plan.

Combined, the extension of the No. 7 Subway Line and increased commuter capacity under the Hudson River will make transportation to and from the Hudson Yards district viable. This increase

in traffic to the Far West Side of Manhattan, however, will significantly burden other parts of the transportation system. For this reason, CHPC believes the City should continue to move forward aggressively on transit initiatives. Included among these, but not limited to, are initiatives to bring Metro-North rail service into Penn Station via the Empire Line and to extend LIRR service into Grand Central and Lower Manhattan. These measures will help mitigate vehicular traffic at surface level and also ensure the continued viability of the region's transit system. Residents, visitors, and workers alike will benefit if future transportation needs are planned for in a comprehensive, coordinated, and coherent manner.