

October 27, 2005

Atlantic Yards c/o Planning & Environmental Review
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RE: Comments on Draft Scope of Analysis for an Environmental Impact Statement
for the Atlantic Yards Arena and Redevelopment Project

The proposed project to create a major mixed-use development in the Atlantic Terminal area of Brooklyn could bring substantial benefits to New York City and the tri-state metropolitan area. By creating dense, mixed use development around one of the busiest transit hubs in the region, the project is broadly consistent with regional planning principles that seek to encourage growth around transit facilities in the region's urban core. However, these benefits need to be weighed against the specific impacts on Downtown Brooklyn and surrounding communities, and compared to the net benefits of feasible alternatives. A thorough, accurate environmental impact statement is critical to this evaluation.

The following comments are intended to strengthen the analysis and the confidence that the public can have in the results. While they represent Regional Plan Association's primary concerns, they are not meant to minimize issues that may be identified by others in the comment period.

1. Full public disclosure of assumptions, data and methodology: All of the baseline conditions, supporting data and the methodology for analysis should be made public prior to their use in projecting future conditions. This will allow for the correction of any inaccurate data or unreasonable assumptions, and is critical to insuring confidence in the results. These results should also be presented with sufficient detail, data and documentation to allow for qualified professionals to replicate and evaluate the findings.
2. Project Description
 - a) Page 2: The specifications of the proposed program variation, including the amount and locations of alternative uses, should be clearly shown in comparison to baseline program in tables and maps. For purposes of analysis, this variation should also be treated as an equally likely outcome of the project, particularly if the final project allows the sponsors to vary the uses as-of-right.
 - b) Page 3: The new subway entrance should be fully described, including width, depth, location in or outside the building line, and openness to air and light.

- c) Page 4: The proposed LIRR improvements should include an analysis of other alternatives. For example, what is the least expensive rail yard configuration that could be implemented? Could the rail yards be discontinued, particularly after the completion of the MTA's East Side Access project? What are the implications for LIRR operations in each of these instances? This is particularly important considering the cost to the project and the implications for variations or alternatives to the program.
- d) Page 4: The implications of the LIRR rail yard redesign for the possible Lower Manhattan rail link to Kennedy airport and the LIRR should be evaluated, including whether the redesign will make it impossible, more difficult or more expensive to extend any rail service from Lower Manhattan.

Discretionary Approvals

3.

- a) Page 8: Table 2 should indicate ownership and status of negotiations for each lot.

4. Future Baseline Conditions

- a) Page 10: The cumulative impact of the project and the recently approved rezoning for Downtown Brooklyn, particularly for traffic conditions, should be a key objective of the analysis. The rezoning projects 6.7 million square feet of development by 2013 and an additional 7 million square feet in potential projects over an indefinite period of time. While the Atlantic Yards development is projected for completion in 2016, the marginal burden that it will place on the transportation and other infrastructure systems will become increasingly severe as the rest of Downtown Brooklyn is built out. Therefore, the exclusion of projects other than those anticipated by 2013 would unreasonably minimize the potential impacts of the project. Whatever impact year for is chosen for future conditions, it should include both projected and potential development of the Downtown Brooklyn rezoning as well as any other anticipated projects.

5. Land Use, Zoning and Public Policy

- a) Page 14: No justification is provided for the study area boundaries. While any boundary is somewhat arbitrary, the 1/2 mile radius appears too restrictive. A larger study area should be considered, and the rationale for the boundaries should be documented.

6. Open Space

- a) Page 20: The configuration of and access to the open space will be as important as its size, location and programming. These will all be critical to how well the project as a whole is integrated with the surrounding communities and how pedestrians will flow through the project. In addition to the open space ratios and other measures described in the scope, the EIS should analyze likely use by residents in the study area considering location, programming, hours of public use, configuration and design. To the extent possible, comparable parks and public spaces should be examined to assess probable use of this space.

7. Traffic and Parking

- a) Page 27: The statement that the traffic analysis will focus on the basketball use of the arena is inconsistent with the description of Reasonable Worst Case Scenario analysis described on page 12, and indicates that the commuting time issues could be insufficiently analyzed. The impact of the commercial development in particular could be significant on peak period traffic, especially when considered in conjunction with the other Downtown Brooklyn development.
- b) Page 28: The mode choice analysis, particularly for the arena, can be difficult to estimate and should look at a variety of sources. These should include an independent survey of likely patrons, modal splits for other Brooklyn sports and cultural facilities, and other arenas in comparable settings.

8. Mitigation

- a) Page 35: A procedure should be established to insure that all mitigation measures are completed and monitored for continued compliance, maintenance and effectiveness once they are in place.

9. Alternatives

- a) Page 35: At least one Low-Density alternative should be thoroughly analyzed for costs, projected benefits and impacts, and sufficiently detailed that it can be compared to the proposed project. This should include either one of the community-sponsored alternatives or the Extell Corporation proposal made to the MTA, since these are the most concrete alternatives available. Thorough analysis of a small number of alternatives is far more important than a cursory analysis of a large number. Because of the public importance of this site and because the state will override city zoning and land use review, alternatives should be judged by the comprehensive set of public benefits and costs that they would bring, and not rejected solely because they do not include some of the elements stated on page 5 that are particular to the proposed project, such as the creation of an arena or a state-of-the-art rail yard.

Thank you for your attention to these comments. Please feel free to contact me at (212) 253-2727, ext. 321, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Christopher Jones
Vice President for Research