

Jeff Strabone
Member of Community Board 6

General objections

1. Process

The state's "public benefits corporation" model is the wrong way to develop the Atlantic Yards. The success of large-scale urban developments depends on three things: community input, accountability of elected officials, and market competition. The model driving the Atlantic Yards is akin to Soviet state planning: the state is imposing this development on the public without the public's approval or participation.

2. Aesthetics and size

Page 4 of the Draft Design Guidelines (GPP Exhibit B) states that the project will "[Create an undulating skyline along Atlantic Avenue](#)". The interior of Brooklyn is an area for low-rise neighborhoods, not skylines. Manhattan can be a laboratory for contemporary architecture. Brooklyn is a place for continuity and context-sensitive design. I am excited that world-class architects like Santiago Calatrava, Norman Foster, and Renzo Piano have brought their talents to Manhattan. I also admire Frank Gehry's modest 299-seat design for Theatre for New Audience, across the street from BAM. But the interior of Brooklyn is not the place for signature architects to impose their personal vision 620 feet in the sky.

3. Density

The density of the Atlantic Yards is insupportable and will make much of Brooklyn unliveable and unsafe. Nowhere in Brooklyn should 14,410 new residents be crammed into four city blocks. As admitted by the DEIS itself, the intersections along Atlantic and Flatbush are already deadly to motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians (page 12-15). The addition of 14,410 residents, 20,500 arena-goers, and thousands of office workers can only lead to more death and injury along these already busy streets. Within the quarter-mile study area, the population will increase by 60% (calculated from page 6-5). No mitigation scheme can prevent the dangers that such overcrowding will create.

Specific objections

4. Superblocks and de-mapping

The creation of superblocks and the de-mapping of city streets will create pedestrian obstacles that will cut neighborhoods off from each other and exacerbate traffic.

5. Traffic

Due to the project's density, the traffic increases forecast by the DEIS will make the area substantially more dangerous, substantially more polluted, and substantially less desirable than a project of contextually-appropriate density for Brooklyn. According to page 12-2, "[By 2016, the commercial mixed-use variation \(the reasonable worst-case scenario \[RWCS\] for the weekday traffic analyses\) is expected to add between 438 and 2,581](#)

autos to the study area street system in each weekday peak hour, and from 120 to 412 new taxi trips. Peak hour truck trips would increase by from 6 to 84 in each weekday peak hour. In general, the highest numbers of new weekday vehicle trips would occur during the 7-8 PM (pre-game) and 10-11 PM (postgame) peak hours, primarily as a result of demand en route to and from the arena. On Saturdays, the residential mixed-use variation (the RWCS for the Saturday analyses) would add an estimated 2,638 auto, 402 taxi, and six truck trips to the street system in the 1-2 PM peak hour, and 2,922 auto, 458 taxi, and no truck trips in the 4-5 PM peak hour in 2016."

6. Enclosed "open space"

The location of the development's "open space" will be mostly limited to the interior courtyard of the superblock between Carlton and Vanderbilt Avenues. Pedestrian access and visibility all along the superblock will be limited to passageways between the apartment buildings. The "open space" will in fact be little more than the private backyard of the Atlantic Yards residents. Within the "open space" itself, visitors will be unpleasantly surrounded by tall buildings. The "open space" will in fact be enclosed space.

7. Ownership of open space

Open space developed over the trainyards ought to remain public property under the stewardship of the Parks Department. The development's "open space" will be private property patrolled by private security firms. Unlike city parks, its hours and access will be controlled by private entities.

8. Non-commitment to open space

According to page 6-17, "As stated above, the publicly accessible open space component of the proposed project would not be created during Phase I. This minimum of seven acres of publicly accessible open space would be created during Phase II and is therefore discussed in "Probable Impacts of the Proposed Project—2016" below." In short, there will be no publicly accessible open space if the project does not proceed beyond Phase I. Therefore, Phase I ought to be amended to include the creation of public space by the earliest possible date.

9. Stress on existing parks

The addition of 14,410 new residents will lead to unpleasant use levels in Prospect Park and Fort Greene Park.

10. Adverse effects on black neighborhoods

The vision of Brooklyn that we all share recognizes diversity as one of our borough's strengths. The DEIS clearly shows that black neighborhoods will be the ones most displaced and disrupted by the project. According to page 4-45, "As shown in Figure 4-6, a majority of the 10 Census tracts containing potentially at-risk population (tracts in which average household income for renters in unregulated buildings is lower than the average household income for all Brooklyn renters) are

located in the eastern portion of the _-mile study area and generally more than _ mile from the project site. Four of the tracts (233, 229, 227, and 231) are located in the Bedford-Stuyvesant subarea and eastern portion of the Clinton Hill subarea, three (215, 223, and 225) are located in the Prospect Heights subarea, two (29.01 and 31) are located in the Fort Greene subarea and eastern portion of the Downtown Brooklyn subarea, and one (125) is located in the Gowanus subarea."

The statement is clear: the DEIS projects that black Brooklynites will disproportionately be displaced by the Atlantic Yards.

11. Sewage

The DEIS contains no plan for the total amount of sewage the project will generate. The development's commendable recycling of stormwater runoff will have no effect on the volume of sewage produced by tens of thousands of new toilet flushes each day within Pump Station Area RH-034 (see figure 11-2). Given the frequency of CSO overflows in the Gowanus Canal already, there is currently no place for new waste to go. Pages 11-20 to 11-21 describe features of a future "[amended drainage plan](#)" still under review by DEP. This plan must be approved and made public before any new construction is approved. But according to the data in the DEIS, this plan will not be enough. According to page 11-2, the new sewage generated by the project would equal 1.75 mgd, yet the improvement of the Gowanus Pumping Station would only upgrade capacity from 28.5 mgd to 30 mgd (pages 11-8, 11-16 to 11-17). Where will the other .25 million mgd go? The DEIS also admits that the sewage upgrade would not be completed in time for the completion of Phase I by 2010. It further admits that "[The installation of sewers would be phased, generally following the development of the proposed project.](#)" Sewage upgrades must precede construction and their added capacity must at least match the new sewage generated.

12. Eminent domain

Eminent domain should not be used to transfer land from one private ownership to another.

13. Arena's proximity to residences

According to page 3-2 of the DEIS, "[The New York City Zoning Resolution prohibits arenas within 200 feet of residential districts as some of the operations could be incompatible with districts limited primarily to residential use.](#)" The paragraph goes on to say that the project "[has been designed to minimize its presence and effect on the residential uses on these blocks](#)", but that claim, however debatable, does not change the fact of the violation of the Zoning Resolution.

14. Bicycle path

The bicycle path described on page 6-25 should not run through the development's private property. Provision should be made, instead, for twenty-four-hour bike lanes on city streets.

15. Adverse effect on Williamsburgh Savings Bank

The Atlantic Yards development should not be tall enough to obstruct views of the Williamsburgh Savings Bank, Brooklyn's tallest and most iconic building. According to page 7-2, "[Views of the Williamsburgh Savings Bank Building along the Flatbush Avenue view corridor from south of the project site would be obstructed except from vantage points on Flatbush Avenue immediately adjacent to the project site. This would constitute a significant adverse impact on historic resources.](#)" The Williamsburgh Savings Bank has remained a historical icon of Brooklyn not just because of its design features and clock tower but because it stands alone in a low-lying district, apart from other tall buildings, much like Manhattan's Empire State Building. As the DEIS concedes on page 7-31, "[with the Phase I development, this historic building would be viewed in the context of several large towers.](#)" The Atlantic Yards buildings should not be tall enough to compete with the Williamsburgh Savings Bank visually.