



**THE CITY OF NEW YORK
BOROUGH OF BROOKLYN
COMMUNITY BOARD #7**

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**Testimony of Jeremy Laufer, District Manager of Community Board 7/Brooklyn to the
New York City Council, Land Use Committee,
Subcommittee on Planning, Dispositions and Concessions
Concerning the CB7/Brooklyn 197-a Plan: New Connections/New Opportunities
December 15, 2009**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Community Board 7 and its 197a Plan, New Connections/New Opportunities. It has been a 13 year effort to create this plan and I would like to publicly thank our past and current Chairs, Beatrice DeSapio, Councilwoman Sara Gonzalez, Joseph Longobardi and Randolph Peers as well as my predecessor as District Manager, Eugene Moore, for a shared vision and incredible stamina in developing a plan over so long a period of time. It is important to note that despite changes in our leadership over the many years, our board has remained committed to this vision. Almost ten years ago, when I started as District Manager of Community Board 7, when Councilwoman Gonzalez was Chairwoman Gonzalez, I listed the completion of the 197-a as one of my three personal goals for my tenure. I'm happy to note that the final vote on this plan will force me to set some new goals.

I would especially like to thank Joseph Longobardi, who has also been our 197-a Committee's Chairperson for most of its existence, as well as Jocelyn Chait, our planner, for the time and herculean effort they put into this with minimal or no compensation. I'm not sure if Jocelyn was even paid minimum wage for all the hours she put into this study. Betty MacIntosh from the Department of City Planning must be acknowledged as well. She guided us through this process and spent many hours working with us to keep our plan moving forward. Sometimes it felt as if it were Betty's plan, she seemed to care so much about it. I would also be remiss if I failed to mention the many individuals and organizations that donated money to create this plan.

Community Board 7's 197-a Plan focuses on the entire Sunset Park waterfront, from 15th to 65th Streets, from Third Avenue to the water. This comprehensive plan seeks to strengthen the industrial base of our community and prevent encroachment of housing that may drive up real estate prices and make the manufacturing and warehousing core untenable. About 40,000 jobs exist in their area and, as the number two walk to work community in NYC, the loss or reduction in the number of jobs would be devastating to our working class community. Thus, our plan seeks to strengthen and enhance our industrial community.

At the same time, we are a waterfront community that has not been able to enjoy the benefits of such. We currently have no recreational facilities along our waterfront and our one point of public access, close to our southern border, is a ferry pier that is used mostly for parking. A major part of our plan seeks to correct this historic imbalance and create a large waterfront park along the centerline of our community and other amenities that are beneficial to our largely poor and working class community.

So while our plan seeks to strength our industrial community and recognizes the importance our waterfront has played and can once again play for the region's economy, we also recognize the need for additional local amenities for the people who live in our community, which has less than a third of the city's standard of parkland per capita. The plan seeks to balance these seemingly opposite needs and focuses and the need for waterborne activities, whether economic or recreational, immediately adjacent to the waterfront.

As I mentioned, this has been a thirteen year effort, and some of our wishes and needs are already being met, as evidenced by the current construction of waterfront.

The majority of the 197-a looks at plans and policies of numerous city agencies and makes recommendations that we believe will strengthen our industrial community through smart development, marshalling of appropriate resources, repair and improvement of infrastructure and the need to create a sustainable, green economy on the local and regional levels.

The CB7 197-a Plan is the community's voice in the ongoing discussions on the future of our waterfront. We have met innumerable times with many agencies, especially City Planning and the Economic Development Corporation to coordinate, where possible, and to discuss our ideas and vision for our own community. We believe that our plan shares many of the goals of the city agencies potentially affected by it because we have held many discussions with these agencies and have worked diligently to find common ground and frankly, we have had many years to lobby and convince agencies to see things our

way. Earlier this year we were quite pleased to see EDC's Sunset Park Vision Plan which acknowledges the work we did on our 197-a Plan and shares many of the same goals.

Admittedly, we are not in complete agreement with all City agencies. The Department of Sanitation does not share our goal of moving its two sanitation garages off our waterfront, as we would like to see all waterfront properties used for waterborne economic activities or recreation, not dead storage. That is an issue on which we will continue to agree to disagree.

When Robert Moses created that terrible scar in our community, the Gowanus Expressway, he succeeded not only in creating a physical barrier for our constituents but a mental barrier as well as generations of Sunset Park residents grew up with no connection to our own waterfront. This plan seeks to bridge this divide and recreate a working, stable waterfront that is fully integrated into the larger community and provides our community with resources and amenities that are available to every other waterfront community in New York City. While we recognize the importance our waterfront holds for our regional economy, we seek a balance of uses so that our community benefits from its proximity to the water, rather than continually being victimized by our proximity with negative uses, such as power plants and garbage facilities.

Two months ago, a politician in another Brooklyn community, not a Councilperson I'm happy to report, suggested Sunset Park as an alternative site for a sanitation facility proposed in his neighborhood. That has been the history of Sunset Park. We were a dumping ground for unpopular facilities for decades. With the creation and ultimately, hopefully, approval of our 197-a Plan, our residents have seized control of their own future and have declared that our community is no longer what it had been. Our people and our businesses must be taken into account and our interests and concerns must be addressed. Truly, this is a great day for our community.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Community Board 7 and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.