THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

***Testimony: Assemblyman Vito J Lopez***
***Domino Sugar Scoping Meeting***
***July 31, 2007***

Good afternoon Commissioner Burden and distinguished members of the panel. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today. I am here on behalf of Assemblyman Vito J Lopez to discuss the current proposal for the Domino Sugar site set forth by the Community Preservation Corporation (CPC).

I would first like to take this opportunity to applaud CPC for their continued efforts to include affordability in development projects throughout New York City and express my support for the development of the Williamsburg-Greenpoint Waterfront. Assemblyman Lopez has always been a staunch advocate of affordable housing for low-income and working class people in New York City. He has passed significant legislation and allocated funding that has resulted in the production of literally thousands of units of housing in the five boroughs. Although the Domino site does provide a significant number of affordable units in the presented plan, housing is not the only issue at hand.

As community leaders we have an obligation to be thoughtful as we forge ahead with the development of the Brooklyn Waterfront. While the Assemblyman believes that the production of affordable housing, especially along the waterfront is imperative, these needs must be addressed in a balanced way. The Domino site presents several unique challenges that must be addressed along side the need for affordable housing:

1. **Density and Population Growth**
   Community Board 1 has long been concerned with the rapid population growth in Greenpoint and Williamsburg and the effects this may have on city infrastructure and neighborhood character. These concerns have been clearly articulated in the Community Needs report for the past several years. If the proposal proceeds in its current form Williamsburg will be home to 2,400 new units of housing. This population growth is sure to put a great strain on the already overburdened resources in the community such as sanitation, garbage collection, and transportation.

   One of our greatest concerns regarding large-scale projects continues to be the effect population increases of this size will have on traffic and public transportation. With the L train already severely overcrowded, and the J and G trains overflowing during rush hour, drastic population increase can have only one of two results: a greater number of people driving through Williamsburg, or a significant increase in rider-ship on public transit

lines. This coupled with Mayor Bloomberg's proposed "congestion pricing" plan does not bode well for Williamsburg residents.

2. **Zoning and Identity**

The Domino site also presents a unique opportunity for City Planning. While the rest of the waterfront is currently zoned for 30 and 40 story buildings, CPC's land is currently zoned 'Manufacturing' with a maximum height of 22 stories. Their plans call for nearly a 100% increase in height to 40 stories. It is important to note that in the case of this land City Planning has the ability to limit height and advocate for lower density.

Historically, Williamsburg is a low-rise community and CB1 has always supported contextual zoning both on the waterfront and upland sites. In a recent contentious vote at Community Board 1, many neighborhood residents were adamantly opposed to the construction of a 22 story project just blocks from the Domino Site. Commitment to moderate density and low-rise development is key to maintaining Williamsburg's identity. There is both broad political and community support to reduce the height at the proposed site.

In many instances developers along the waterfront have been able to produce a large number of affordable units while also attempting to keep the height of their buildings to a reasonable number of stories. For example, at the Schaeffer site developers were able to commit nearly 40% of their overall units to affordable housing, while also maintaining a more reasonable height at 25 stories. Though much of the zoning allows for taller buildings along the waterfront, 40 story building should not considered the norm on the Brooklyn waterfront. Allowing for a drastic increase in height that blatantly ignores the contextual zoning of the neighborhood creates a dangerous precedent for inland Brooklyn neighborhoods that are committed to a low-rise, close-knit identity.

The tension between height, density, and affordability has persisted throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. It is the Assemblyman's view that there should be a dialogue between the old, modernist sensibility and more organic urban theory espoused by planners such as Jane Jacobs. As much as affordability, space and the effect is has on place must be considered as we move forward. If there is anything that Jane Jacobs has taught us about cities, it is that we cannot simply solve problems through prescriptive measures but that neighborhoods behave like complex systems that communicate spatially, economically, culturally, and socially. We must ask ourselves if affordability must also come at the expensive of low-rise communities and if affordable housing must always be unusually high and dense to exist. While it is progressive and hopeful to imagine a new, economically integrated Domino, it may also be naïve to imagine that this can occur in extremely dense, spatially isolated 'towers in the sky.'

**Conclusion**

The current plan for the Domino Sugar Site as proposed is unacceptable at this point. Until concerns regarding density, zoning, and neighborhood identity are addressed alongside affordability Assemblyman Lopez cannot lend his support to CPC's development of Domino Sugar. The plan requires a major reduction in height to gain

political and community support. Until the 300 and 400 ft buildings are reduced by at least 10 stories the Assemblyman will continue to advocate for a balanced proposal that speaks to all the community's needs. I would like to submit my testimony along with a copy of a letter sent to Community Board 1 stating Assemblyman Lopez's position on the project. I would like to thank the panel for giving me the time to testify here today.

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# Assemblyman Vito J. Lopez Opposes Current Domino Sugar Development Plan

The Community Preservation Corporation (CPC) recently unveiled their development plan and design for the site of the former Domino Sugar factory on the Williamsburg Waterfront. While Assemblyman Lopez appreciates CPC's inclusion of 25% of the waterfront units as affordable housing, which is roughly consistent to the Greenpoint-Williamsburg Waterfront Rezoning, he has serious objections with respect to the height and density of the project.

Williamsburg is primarily a low-rise residential neighborhood which supports a dense population. CPC has proposed to build two 40-story towers and two 30-story towers producing approximately 2,200 residential units on the Domino site. While other waterfront developers have not exceeded 35-stories, CPC insists that they must build higher.

The construction of towers of this height and density would have profound effects that will not only change the character of this neighborhood, it would also further burden a community that already struggles to keep up with growing demands on its infrastructure. For example, the transportation system serving this area is at capacity. Furthermore, allowing the construction of 40-story towers will change this neighborhood from the tight-knit, low-rise residential community to a Gold Coast coveted by the Manhattan elite. The implications of excessive development are far reaching and may ultimately contribute to the displacement of long term community residents in Williamsburg.

## Assemblyman Lopez Supports:

- ***Maximum Affordability** on the Waterfront – **NOT Maximum Profits***
- *Utilization of all possible subsidies to increase affordability and decrease height*
- *No more than **25-story** buildings at this site*
- *Prevailing Wages for building service workers on the Waterfront*
- *50% Community Preference for the affordable units*