

Williamsburg/Greenpoint

NAG

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NAG Hearing Statement
for the
Public Scoping Meeting on the Community Preservation Corporation
Proposed Domino Sugar Rezoning

Tuesday, July 31, 2007
Department of City Planning, 22 Reade Street, New York, NY 10007

My name is Peter Gillespie. I'm the Executive Director of Neighbors Allied for Good Growth (NAG), which is a community planning and environmental justice organization that has been providing services and advocacy work to Greenpoint-Williamsburg since 1994. Our mission is to integrate the North Brooklyn waterfront back into the upland neighborhoods while maintaining the community's mixed-income and mixed-use character *and* leveraging private development to help create a sustainable, livable community. We therefore view the redevelopment of the Domino Sugar facility as an opportunity to achieve long-standing -- yet unmet – community planning and development goals.

If approved, Community Preservation Corporation's project would be the largest in our community's history, dwarfing ongoing waterfront developments. It should therefore be evaluated in terms of the potential adverse impacts on neighborhood character including secondary displacement of upland affordable housing; indirect adverse socioeconomic effects on local commercial activity; and direct and indirect conflicts with adjacent industrial/manufacturing businesses and jobs. In addition, the CPC proposal will strain an already overburdened mass transit system; impose new hardships on the local public schools and other community facilities like fire services; and conflict with -- even undermine -- important land-use policies and programs established in the City's recent Greenpoint-Williamsburg rezoning plan. We therefore strongly recommend that the City require CPC to review the impacts of their proposal -- and the scope of work required -- in the most comprehensive way possible. This should include increasing the land-use study area; broadening categories for indirect residential, commercial and industrial displacement; considering new mitigation measures that truly alleviates adverse effects; and requiring at least two lesser-build alternatives that are consistent with the City's recent waterfront rezoning and that mirrors the official Community Board response to that rezoning.

Because of the scale of the CPC proposal, and viewed as an extension of the City's Greenpoint-Williamsburg rezoning, there are other evaluations that might <u>not</u> be required of the developer under CEQR that should be undertaken by the City in conjunction with any rezoning. Broad

evaluations in the areas of public education, mass transportation, and public open space should be undertaken resulting in new polices and programs that address unmet community needs. If City planning is not willing or able to impose stricter and broader evaluation requirements in consideration of the impacts of CPC's project, then we recommend that the rezoning not be approved and that the City recommit to an as-of-right reuse of the site.

We recommend that the City require CPC to include in their analysis of secondary residential displacement a broader study area than the 1/2-mile now recommended. This area should include the entire Southside neighborhood -- there are a few blocks that CPC are not considering -- as well as significant parts of the adjacent East Williamsburg residential neighborhood. We also recommend that CPC's analysis of secondary residential displacement be expanded to include residents of stabilized and rent controlled units. Our firsthand experience has shown (and the stories are many and extremely distressing) that because of socioeconomic trends -- in combination with unrelenting tenant harassment, illegal evictions, and lease buyouts -- significant numbers of existing, and what should be protected, affordable housing is being lost in the upland neighborhoods. We also recommend that CPC analyze the risk population in terms of ethnicity, since the Southside neighborhood has for decades been a predominately Latino community, which alone will shoulder much of the burden of residential displacement. Also, to help mitigate residential displacement we recommend the creation of a new category of community preference for new affordable housing -- first proposed by Borough President Markowitz and supported by Councilmember Reyna -- that would include already displaced families dating back to the certification of the zoning proposal.

CPC is also requesting significant density increases and building height allowances that exceed both waterfront and upland restrictions imposed in the City's Greenpoint-Williamsburg rezoning and allows the transfer of waterfront density to upland sites. (CPC's waterfront density of 5.5 FAR in contrast with the 4.7 FAR allowed along the rest of the rezoned waterfront, and their upland 6.0 FAR in contrast with the maximum 3.6 FAR in the upland areas, is a whopping 28% increase.) The street-wall allowance of 10 stories and the proposed upland 14 story tower significantly exceeds the present restrictions and if adopted could set a dangerous precedent and should be evaluated in this light.

To better evaluate the impacts of the scale of their proposal, CPC should also be required to include in their scope of work, two lesser build alternatives. The first alternative should restrict the height and density of the project's waterfront and upland portions to conform to the City's approved Greenpoint-Williamsburg rezoning plan. The second alternative should conform to the height and density restrictions recommended in Community Board #1's ULURP response to the City's rezoning proposal.

At the time of its purchase three years ago, the Domino site was occupied by an industrial user, outside the City's rezoning study area, and only being considered by City Planning for industrial reuse -- which was stated publicly by City officials at the time. Because of these factors, the site was purchased --according to public records -- for $55 million, which is consistent with manufacturing uses. As a comparable, 184 Kent Avenue, another waterfront industrial building located three blocks from the Domino site, recently sold for over $60 million and is slated for only around 350 units of housing, well short of CPC's 2,400 units. Also, since

CPC's purchase, market rate housing prices in the area have gone through the roof topping out at $1,000/ buildable square foot, significantly increasing potential returns on investment. Therefore, any public action that grants both a zoning changes and massive density bonuses must require higher percentages of affordability than is now being proposed. We therefore recommend that CPC's present proposal and both lesser build alternatives that we're recommending, include analysis of affordability requirements at 40 and 50 percent. This would allow the public to better evaluate the impacts of their proposal while accomplishing CPC's stated affordable housing goals.

Because CPC's proposal creates less commercial space than the CEQR triggering threshold, they've concluded that there will not be a significant indirect impact on the upland commercial sector. We recommend that this premise be reconsidered in terms of its impact on neighborhood character, which CEQR defines as an amalgam of different elements that make up the "personality" of a neighborhood. A strong case could be made that, 120,000 square feet of new commercial space coupled with the influx of thousands of very high income residents housed in over 1,700 new luxury condominiums will significantly impact the central Southside commercial strip along Bedford Ave through upward pressure on commercial rents and the elimination of many businesses that now provide goods and services to the low and moderate income Southside residents. (In fact, we estimate that the commercial space in their proposal equals the entire Southside Bedford Avenue strip.)

Also because CPC proposes to upzone a nine-acre heavy manufacturing zone to residential, we concluded that it will also have significant indirect impacts on the adjacent manufacturing areas: the six blocks adjacent to the site between Grand St and North 3rd Street on the East River and the nearby Greenpoint-Williamsburg Industrial Business Zone located just ten-blocks north, which is already under intense pressures resulting from the City's rezoning. CPC should be required to evaluate the impact of their proposal on both these fragile manufacturing areas in their Environmental Impact Statement.

A similar argument could be made in relation to CPC's proposal to downzone two adjacent M3-1 blocks to M1-2. Coupled with the precedent setting transfer of significant density and height to its upland block between South 3rd and 4th Street, we concluded that this action will directly impact the businesses on those blocks -- the approximately 40 businesses that occupy 130,000 square feet of industrial and 50,000 square feet of commercial space. In addition, M-1 designations allow incompatible uses like superstores and hotels and therefore should be evaluated along with appropriate use-group restrictions. Also, CPC's alternative MX designations for the so-called "Non-Project Rezoned Areas" would allow as-of-right residential development and therefore would have even greater adverse impacts on the existing industrial and commercial businesses and should automatically be considered out-of- scope. Mitigation measures should include a much more proactive industrial business displacement program coupled with City actions such as establishing the long-term viability of the Office of Industrial and Manufacturing Businesses and adopting the Industrial Employment Districts Zoning.

Despite the acceleration of residential construction since the approval of the City's Greenpoint-Williamsburg rezoning, unemployment figures for Community District #1 have remained stagnant while citywide figures have significantly declined during the same period. Informal surveys of construction sites and suppliers of building materials, anecdotal information gathered

in ongoing outreach efforts, and the displacement of manufacturing businesses in the upland area confirms this fact. Though promised, the City's recent rezoning has not generated jobs for people in the neighborhood, and unless better mitigation measures are introduced there's every reason to believe that the Domino Project will only worsen these trends in local economic activity. Mitigation should therefore include both measures that address the displacement of local businesses and jobs and requirements that CPC hires locally on all levels of their development project. There are many qualified construction firms, architects and planners, contractors, marketing groups, crafts persons, and building material supply companies in the community that should benefit from CPC's project. Recruiting locally would create new jobs and serve to generate much-needed and broader economic development activity.

We also have concerns regarding the effects of CPC's proposal on neighborhood transportation. The L-line is already one of the most over-burdened subway lines in the city, without much room for increased capacity, and the JMZ line is gaining passengers by the day. To address transportation impacts and mitigation, CPC proposed – in a recent presentation to the North Brooklyn Alliance – the creation of a shuttle bus service from the site to unspecified locations. We recommend that CPC include upland stops along its routes and that it's integrated into a district-wide waterfront transportation plan that's created by the City in response to any rezoning approval. Also, since Kent Avenue is one of the district's most important north-south truck routes and one of the major truck routes in Brooklyn, CPC should evaluate any potential adverse impacts on this transportation category including the potential impacts from the diversion of trucks and traffic to upland streets.

CPC also proposes 100,000 square feet of space for unspecified community facility use. While this could provide much-needed public amenities, it's enough space to fit four Madison Square Garden arenas. Therefore, CPC should provide specific uses for this space and evaluate the impact of these specific uses accordingly.

As a consequence of the City's rezoning, City Planning has estimated a dramatic increase in the residential population, projecting the development of significant amounts of new housing between 2004 and 2014. And yet, the Department of Education (DoE) has projected a 34% decrease in student enrollment during the same period, including in schools in CPC's study area. This decrease is the result of the displacement of low and moderate-income families that have historically attended the local public schools while many new residents are sending their children to out-of-district schools that they feel better meet their educational needs. We have concluded that CPC's proposal will only worsen this trend and therefore should be evaluated from this perspective. Either CPC or the City should create a study to determine the extent of student flight from District 14 to other districts throughout Brooklyn and Manhattan, and address the underlying reasons for this flight. To address this issue we also recommend that the Department of Education implement a comprehensive plan for the improvement of District 14 public schools.

Finally, in retrospect –given Schaeffer Landing, the Kedeem Winery rezoning, significant development outside the rezoned area, and now the CPC's proposal -- the projections that the City's rezoning would generate around 7,400 new units of housing seems extremely conservative at this point. Therefore, open space needs, particularly in the Southside must be reevaluated. We recommend that CPC be required to study the creation of a new waterfront park on the city-owned property adjacent to their site underneath the Williamsburg Bridge south to Broadway.

The City should also commit to developing a park on this site to service the Southside community in conformance with the recent recommendation of the New York City Council Committee on Waterfronts. Thank you.