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Public Testimony Submitted by
Jerilyn Perine
Executive Director Citizens Housing and Planning Council
NYC Planning Commission
July 31, 2007
Re: Domino Sugar Refinery Site, Williamsburg, Brooklyn

My name is Jerilyn Perine and I served in City government for 26 years including 18 years at the Department of Housing Preservation and Development where I was responsible for the construction of housing for the homeless, renovating and preserving the City's *in rem* stock, home to some of our City's poorest households and finally as Commissioner where I was the author of Mayor Bloomberg's New Housing Marketplace Plan. I am now the Executive Director of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council (CHPC), one of the City's oldest civic organizations focused on housing, planning and land use.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify in strong support of the actions that you are considering that will ensure the construction of a new residential and mixed use project on the site of the former Domino Sugar refinery.

I would like to emphasize two key reasons for my support of the project as presented in the Scoping Document.

First the transformation of our derelict industrial landscape must be a priority for zoning and land use decisions. Areas originally created to meet the needs of our old industrial economy, are now critical to meet the needs for housing and jobs in the 21st century and to create access to a waterfront that most New Yorkers have rarely seen.

As HPD Commissioner I undertook the transformation and development of the old Schaefer Brewery site. At that time, the City had to incur the costs of the demolition of the old derelict buildings, initiate the environmental assessment and investigation ourselves, prepare the site for development, and prepare and obtain approval for all zoning changes that the project would require. Only after eliminating all of that risk could we attract a developer willing to undertake the project. In only six years, thanks largely to the Mayor's commitment to the transformation of brownfield sites, rezoning for much of the Williamsburg waterfront has been accomplished. This privately owned site is now before you that will make possible the extension of that effort.

The second reason to support this project is that it will increase the overall supply of housing along with a significant component of affordable units. Please note that the development of market rate housing is critical to our city's future. Not only is housing

construction a key economic driver, providing direct jobs and significant local spending, the demand for housing in NYC is extreme and shows little signs of abatement, despite troubling indicators in the country's housing market. The higher ends of the housing market will find a place somewhere. It can bypass the City altogether or push further into the older and more fragile housing stock. High rise market rate new construction doesn't create housing demand, it fulfills it.

The inclusion of 660 affordable units is obviously a unique opportunity that is rarely seen in a single project in NYC. Most notably it is important to understand that had this site been included in the Williamsburg rezoning it would not have been required to provide housing affordable to so many lower income households and at such low income levels. Where the Greenpoint Williamsburg rezoning would have required 20% of the units to be affordable to households earning 80% of area median income, this proposal includes 30% of the units as affordable, including set asides for families at the 30%, 50% and 60% of median income.

And if the proposed changes to 421-a passed by the State Legislature are signed into law by the Governor, this project again would not only meet the requirement but would exceed it by providing not only the required affordable units, but additional affordable units, for low income senior citizens and homeownership opportunities for moderate income New Yorkers . Given the extensive level of public engagement involved in both the Williamsburg rezoning and the recent 421-a debate, surely a project that comes before you with an even greater commitment to affordability should be encouraged and approved.

I would further note that had the project not been required to incur the significant cost burden of retaining the existing sugar refinery building, there would have been even greater flexibility to either provide more affordable units or reach more households at even lower income levels. In addition if this portion of the site were to be included for new construction, the bulk could have been distributed in buildings with a lower height.

But even as it is, the contribution towards helping to meet the needs of low income households is significant.

The Mayor's plan for the year 2030 is projecting that our population will increase by 1 million people over the next two decades. How will we make room for them?

Only by increasing density that actually expands the entire inventory of housing and by government using its land-use powers to increase the availability of buildable sites for a range of housing options can we hope to house our growing population.

Thanks to the commitment of the development team this is a rare moment in which you have the ability to do both by approving the actions that are before you.

Thank you for your time and consideration.