

Civic Alliance Meeting Notes
February 18, 2004
Pace University

I. CDBG Funding

The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:05 AM. Bob Yaro (RPA) introduced the first topic on the agenda: Community Development Block Grant funding for Lower Manhattan. There are approximately \$1.2 billion in CDBG funds left, with many proposals for its use. Some of the main categories of uses that have been proposed include:

- Local physical improvements, such as streetscape, parks and open space, waterfront access, offsite planning projects;
- Job creation and job subsidies, which could be coupled with many of the aforementioned physical improvements to Lower Manhattan;
- Creation of low-income and affordable housing;
- Community facilities such as schools, community centers, cultural space, etc.; and
- Large scale transportation infrastructure, specifically, the link to JFK Airtrain;

There are two comment periods currently open that relate to this funding. The first is a comment period on the Neighborhood Outreach Workshops that LMDC and the City of New York held this summer to gather feedback on plans for both the CDBG funding and transportation funding, the results of which they released in a (much delayed) report this January. The comment period on the report is open until February 29. The other opportunity for comment is on the LMDC's Partial Action Plan 06, which proposes the use of \$50,000,000 for the creation of affordable housing in Lower Manhattan, with the term affordable applying to families earning between approximately \$50,000 and \$80,000 a year. This comment period is open until February 21.

Bob then posed the question on how the Civic Alliance should plug into this process. We have been discussing for a long time how the CDBG funds should be used, and while all the members of the Civic Alliance may not be in agreement about the specific set of projects, we agree that the public should be consulted about the division of the funding. He reported that the RPA and FPI, as part of the "Beyond 16 Acres" series have proposed to hold a public workshop on Tuesday, March 16 on the subject of the use of the CDBG funding. This workshop would be similar to a Listening to the City/ Imagine New York –

type format, where participants would discuss the options at roundtables, and that the meeting structure would encourage different groups to come to consensus on the issues.

Finally, he mentioned that the timing of this event is crucial because the Governor has pledged to come to a decision in April regarding options for JFK access to Lower Manhattan, and there is strong sentiment in the Lower Manhattan business community that the funding should be used for this project. The item was then open to discussion.

Civic Alliance participants expressed receptivity to the idea of hosting a workshop on this issue. Paul Epstein (ASPA) suggested that the Civic Alliance should take the opportunity of the comment period for the Neighborhood Workshops to state that the workshops should be the beginning of the public input period, not the end of them, and to register our intention of holding a follow-up workshop to form consensus on the CDBG funding. Ethel Sheffer (APA) raised the question of how the workshop should be structured, and suggested it may smart to build on the LMDC's outreach efforts and their report, which some have suggested is a fair and useful summary, and move stakeholders towards setting priorities. Members seemed to agree with this approach.

Some meeting participants cautioned against taking the report at its word, however. Beverly Dolinsky (PCAC MTA) reported that at the forum she had attended, opposition to the West Street bypass plan had been a central focus of participants' comments, and yet the report did not mention this in the section that reported on the meeting she attended. Roland Gephardt (R.Dot) expressed frustration that the report took as long as it did to be released, some six months after the meetings. Margaret Hughes (GOLES) agreed that at the meetings she attended there was a very strict agenda that participants were asked to follow, and that comments that strayed from the format and were not recorded.

There was some discussion on whether our event should focus strictly on offsite planning projects and possible uses for the CDBG funding, or whether it should also incorporate discussion of issues related to the DGEIS, or the short-bypass tunnel. Joan Byron (PICCED) recommend that we focus on the CDBG funding, although some felt that it was also appropriate to discuss the West Street options.

Gene Russianoff raised the issue of the JFK airport link to Lower Manhattan. He urged Civic Alliance participants to think strategically about this issue because the political momentum for this project is moving very quickly, and the proposal for using CDBG funding for the project is also gaining support. He suggested that if the Civic Alliance's objective is to make sure CDBG funding does not go towards this project, it should state as such, as opposed to just promoting discussion about it at the March 16 workshop.

A discussion of the JFK airport link ensued. Members generally agreed that while the coalition would not oppose the project itself, it would oppose the use of CDBG funding for the project. Ethel Sheffer proposed that specific wording be drafted stating the Civic Alliance's preference for the use of the funding, drawing a bit on the history of what the funding has been used for, etc. Bob Yaro asked for a sense of the room indicating

whether members would be willing to sign onto a statement opposed the use of the CDBG funds for the JFK – LM connection. A show of hands indicated that members were in support of this direction. A statement expressing opposition to the use of CDBG funding for this project will be drafted and circulated by email for vote among the Civic Alliance members.

Finally, it was noted that planning would continue for the March 16 event, with RPA and FPI taking the lead, and Civic Alliance members will be notified as details are confirmed.

II. WTC DGEIS

The next topic of discussion was the Civic Alliance's comments on the Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement (DGEIS.) To begin the discussion, Petra Todorovich (RPA) gave an overview of the DGEIS document, and the comments that have been drafted thus far. She emphasized that the purpose of today's discussion was to achieve consensus on the direction and emphasis of the civic alliance statement for the public hearing, to take place later in the afternoon and evening, and then to consider revisions to the larger draft written comment in time for the March 15 comment period deadline. In the last few weeks, the Civic Alliance regulatory and steering committees have met to review the DGEIS. The Civic Alliance submitted comprehensive comments on the Draft Scoping document this summer, which have served as the starting point for the Civic Alliance's comments on the recent DGEIS. The Civic Alliance's comments on the DGEIS should be more focused than the comments on the Draft Scope, and should be confined to the following categories:

- Where we feel the analysis is deficient or incorrect.
- Where we disagree with the proposed mitigation for adverse impacts
- Where we feel the failure to study a something that we called for the Draft Scope has been neglected, and thus exposes the DGEIS to litigation.

She then quickly summarized the structure of the DGEIS, and the comments that the Civic Alliance has drafted, and opened up the floor to comments.

There were a wide variety of comments, many focusing on the adverse traffic, air quality, and construction impacts to the local neighborhood resulting from the construction of the Proposed Action with the other projects to be built at the same time. Generally members were in agreement with the direction of the statement that had been drafted thus far, with the need to highlight our concern about the expected adverse environmental impacts, and the need for greater mitigation measures. Some specific comments included:

- Beverly Willis, (R.Dot), wants to see the site built out as quickly as possible in order to avoid the impact of prolonged construction on Lower Manhattan for many years. To do so, the site should be opened up to a variety of developers to carry this out. R.Dot also expressed concern about the amount of retail space proposed for the site.

- Catherine McVeigh Hughes (Families Association of TriBeCa East) made a variety of comments regarding the insufficiency of the DGEIS in assessing the cumulative impacts of construction on air quality. She contended that the DGEIS may have segmented the project by not including the environmental impact of dismantling the Deutsche Bank building. Air quality in Lower Manhattan is especially a concern because New York City is in non-attainment status by the EPA for ozone, and should approach it soon for particulate matter. She recommended a variety of mitigation and regulatory measures that should be implemented for the WTC site including an air monitoring program, retrofitting construction vehicles, delivery vehicles and MTA buses with particulate filters.
- Multiple members recommended that in the Civic Alliance's recommendation for a Reduced Impact Alternative, housing should be implemented on site in place of office space.
- Paul Elston (Waterfront Park Coalition) stated that he thought the comments that the Civic Alliance had drafted regarding economic impacts of the proposed action were good, but that we need to focus more on the environmental impacts of the proposed action. These comments, and our recommendations for mitigation, need to be brought up to the front of the document and given more emphasis. He also suggested that instead of just calling for reduced office space and greater mix of activities, we should call for an overall reduction of the mass of buildings on the site.
- Bettina Damiani echoed another comment that Community Benefits Agreements should be recommended by the Civic Alliance, especially in light of the heavy subsidization of office space.
- Caroline Martin raised the concern that wind turbines (proposed for the Freedom Tower) have been found to have adverse impacts on local residents because of the vibration, noise, etc. It was decided that the Civic Alliance would refrain from commenting on this issue in the oral testimony, and do more research before submitting the written comments in mid-March.
- More comments echoed the need for stronger language regarding environmental impacts, including the suggestion that the proposed development should be greenhouse gas neutral.

To summarize the many comments, Petra suggested that the following changes be made to the brief oral testimony to be delivered later that day:

- Stronger emphasis on the Civic Alliance's concerns over the cumulative environmental impacts of the Proposed Action with other Lower Manhattan projects and our suggestions on mitigation measures for air quality, construction, traffic and congestion.
- Add to the statement calling for a reduced impact alternative, the need for a reduction in the retail program and an inclusion of housing on site.

After some discussion, Petra Todorovich moved that the Civic Alliance support the direction of the draft written comments as the basis for that day's oral testimony, with the two changes outlined above. The movement was seconded and approved unanimously by voting members present at the meeting. Revised written comments will be distributed in the next week for vote by email.

The meeting adjourned at 11:00 AM.