

**Testimony of Staten Island Borough President James S. Oddo
Bay Street Corridor Rezoning and Related Actions Public Scoping Meeting
June 15, 2016**

Good evening.

My name is Jim Oddo, and I am the Staten Island Borough President.

I would like to start by thanking the local City Planning staff, particularly Staten Island Borough Director Len Garcia Duran and his team, for the amount of time and energy they have already given to this process. It is much appreciated.

Likewise, I thank City Planning Chair Carl Weisbrod and Deputy Mayor Alicia Glen for the many conversations we have had regarding this endeavor, including our most recent meeting just last week at Borough Hall. As I Tweeted following that meeting, any time Alicia, Carl and I get together it is candid, productive, and, dare I say, fun.

I also am grateful to Mayor de Blasio. I spoke with the Mayor last on this matter a month or so ago, just after being briefed by City Planning staff, and voiced my concerns directly to him regarding building heights that staff indicated would be in the pre-scope documents. I will get back to the issue of height shortly.

Let me be clear from the outset: I support a rezoning of this corridor. And, at the risk of sounding Al Gore-like with that whole thing about inventing the Internet, I do believe we at Borough Hall first coined the phrase "Bay Street Corridor." I say that not for bragging rights or out of any pomposity, but to be crystal clear that I believe it is in Stapleton's interests, and in the interests of the entire Downtown Corridor: New Brighton, St. George, and Tompkinsville, to rezone this corridor. Indeed, it benefits all of Staten Island.

People, investments, jobs, economic and cultural opportunities, energy and vibrancy - all will follow. All this while recognizing the renaissance of this area will not take place in a vacuum, and that all of this needs to be done correctly.



The Administration made clear early in its tenure there was going to be a five borough affordable housing plan. All five boroughs would get more housing units, whether they wanted them or not. Given this borough's history of inappropriate development; given the decades-long, seemingly "Wild, Wild West" mentality amongst prior elected officials and builders; given how a bucolic Island that was more country than city was dramatically changed by years of misguided actions and confounding inaction, it is no wonder Staten Islanders of all stripes reflexively cringe at the thought of more housing – be it luxury, market rate or affordable – and reacted warily and with hostility to the Mayor's plan.

As I first told the Administration in early 2014, you can't put 10 pounds of housing into a 6 pound Island, 6 pounds which has, by the way, a 4 pound infrastructure system. We asked the Administration to look at this corridor specifically and although we were surprised to hear the words "Bay Street" in the 2015 State of the City, we believe this is the correct location.

Staten Island is overwhelmingly a bedroom community consisting of 1 and 2 family detached and semi-detached homes. It is true that in many ways – housing typology, housing ownership levels, car ownership percentages, etc. – we more resemble Middle America than we resemble most of the other boroughs, and priority number one for any local elected official is to protect and enhance the quality of life of his constituents. But we can have that small-town feel and still have hip, vibrant, clean, safe and dare I again say "funky" new places to live, work and play near our waterfront.

But we need to get this right.

I very much look forward to the stretch run of this process, where we hone in on all the details to ensure the final product maximizes this moment for the betterment of our community.

So what do we need to get done? Well, let me phrase part of it this way:

Ask Staten Islanders which of these two lines they believe less: 1) The check is in the mail, or 2) You need critical mass first, and then you get the infrastructure improvements you want.

The latter, to quote a Sting lyric from the mid-1980s is "a lie we don't believe any more."

So, as the discussion reaches its heights, (ooh, bad pun, but I will be getting to building heights, I assure you), we need to ensure this effort is more of a holistic neighborhood planning initiative than simply a rezoning, and the results in terms of infrastructure commitments must be upfront, impactful and unwavering.

Folks know I'm a sports fanatic, and while I'm known as being baseball-obsessed, I follow all sports. My fellow Knick fans might have seen the news the other day that a former Knick, 32-year-old Nate Robinson, the enigmatic 5 foot 6 inch guard, just got a tryout with the Seattle Seahawks. Good for him.

Five-six. Sometimes height doesn't matter.

But sometimes it does, and along the Bay Street Corridor, height matters.

Simply put, there is such a thing as too high. There is such a thing as "that corridor is too high, therefore too dense and too much, too soon in too confined an area."

I have expressed this sentiment from the jump, and I have expressed it again and again and again to various officials in the de Blasio Administration, including, as I mentioned earlier, directly to Hizzoner about a month ago.

I mentioned Sting earlier, so let me quote another aging rocker, Ringo Starr, who sang "You're sixteen, you're beautiful and you're mine." He wasn't talking about the Bay Street Corridor.

There will be no sixteen-story building along this portion of the Bay Street corridor. Moreover, in terms of getting this right..."the proverbial young teacher married to the proverbial young nurse"...needs to stop being a line in a speech and they finally need to have policy match the rhetoric. Yes, we want affordability, and yes I am open to a range to help folks all along the economic spectrum, but we need - and I am firmly committed to creating - more housing that doesn't currently exist: workforce housing!

I am committed to seeing that workforce housing is a bulk of the affordable component.

Working class, middle class and, as Anthony Weiner used to like to say, "those striving to make the middle class" – the same folks we have heard about for decades in countless speeches by candidates and elected officials in both parties on all levels of government – finally need to have someone actually help them. Enough of them being a tag line in a campaign and punch lines in a speech. Let's give them a decent place to live. Let's help them. Let's help our seniors. Let's keep our talented young people here. Let's retain and attract folks from the arts community.

Let's get it right.

Borough Hall helped birth the Bay Street Corridor and we are committed to seeing this process through in a way we believe helps this community. We have strong opinions on this plan. I am committed to using all the means afforded me as Borough President, and all the tools at my disposal that I use every day to help this borough, including a 20 year working relationship with Bill de Blasio, to do right by Stapleton, and the entire North Shore Corridor and to do right by Staten Island.

To conclude, here are seven specific changes and/or additions I would like to see in the scope of work:

1. I would like the City Planning Commission and the City Council to include an affordable workforce housing set-aside of 30% of the units at 115% AMI (\$89,355 three-person household) with a 5% requirement between 70% (\$54,390) and 90% (\$69,930) AMI.
2. I want it codified that building heights throughout the Bay Street Corridor be limited to a range acceptable to the community-at-large (55' to 85' max. building height).
3. Within the Special Stapleton Waterfront District (SSWD) I strongly support the modification of existing height controls, including the maximum height of buildings from 55 feet to 125 feet for Subareas A and B1.
4. With regard to Disposition Site #2 (539 Jersey Street / 100 Brook Street), I would like to see the mapped portions of Victory Boulevard be removed from property being disposed to private developers, and transfer that street area to the City's DOT jurisdiction.
5. In lieu of pursuing additional assigned height throughout the BSC, I would like the DCP to consider creating separate building and open space controls under the BSC Urban Design Controls -- with an eye toward the corridor, the existing community and streetscape, and the locations of unique sites suitable for potential signature building locations and new public open spaces.
6. I want to remind the DCP and the Administration that they identified March, 2016 as the timeline for TIS preliminary recommendations. To date there have been no specific infrastructure improvements identified and no particular requirements articulated by other City agencies included in the initiative.
7. I insist on assurances that the rezoning effort cannot move through the ULURP process without also simultaneously identifying the critical infrastructure improvements, funding streams and anticipated implementation timelines prior to a final City Planning Commission vote.

Thank you.