

February 5, 2021

Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of the City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

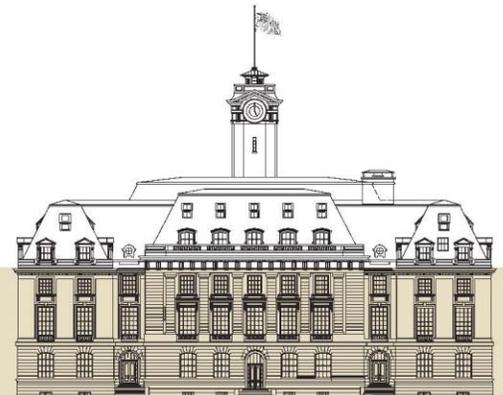
I hope this finds you, the First Lady, and your family healthy and safe.

I am writing to give you some advance notice about a letter I am sending to Housing Development Corporation (HDC) Commissioner, Louise Carroll. In it, I am requesting that HDC reconsider selling a portion of the property that supports the Castleton Park Apartments in St. George to a private developer, who is seeking to overdevelop an adjoining parcel.

My concerns include the lack of transparency surrounding the sale, and disclosures made as part of the draft scope of work filed with the Department of City Planning (DCP). The HDC property is shown as a portion of the development, while at the same time is vaguely identified as part of the adjoining HDC community of 454 families. Additionally, I understand that the property being sold may also include the connection to the city sewer system serving the Castleton Park Apartments. Further, a considerable slope also exists across the property in question, behind the Castleton Park garage structure. This increases my concerns regarding public safety and acceptable means and methods of construction.

Understanding your commitment to provide affordable housing throughout the city, I supported the Bay Street Corridor rezoning - contingent upon proper infrastructure investment. I was the first to say that if an upzoning could work, Stapleton would be the best location. However, even though that rezoning is now complete, there have been no new infrastructure improvements as of this writing.

We are now discussing an unprecedented upzoning in St. George under the guise of affordable housing, and I do not exaggerate the claim that this proposal is unprecedented: 25 and 26 stories overlooking an adjoining block of R3 two-story homes is simply but unequivocally a mistake. In the late 1980s, City Planning methodically downzoned most of the R6 zoning districts on the North Shore and throughout other portions of the borough.



This application also contains a litany of text amendments, including an upzoning to R7, and an increase in the depth of the commercial overlay by almost an additional one hundred feet. Adding insult to injury, DCP is reviewing a special permit to allow additional height above the maximum permitted by the R7 zoning, and almost unbelievably, that special permit is included as part of the application.

To say that your schedule is busy would be an understatement, but I must ask that you take the time to request a briefing from your team on the mechanics of the affordability components. The existing property is zoned R6, a designation that was good enough for the city-supervised Mitchell-Lama Affordable Housing Program at Castleton Park. Something just seems wrong with the disposal of a portion of an HDC property that is already part of an affordable housing development, and then allow a developer to build a density greater than the current zoning, at a height greater than that permitted by the new zoning being proposed under the same application.

This proposal is so overbuilt that the total number of units will be more than double that supported at Castleton Park. I do not believe that private developers should be given a pass by City Planning to overdevelop medium density sites. Simply put, this proposal, as designed, does not work for this St. George location; the site is not even mapped within the St. George Special District (SGSD) or waterfront commercial zones. The SGSD was established by City Planning to support pedestrian-friendly businesses and residential districts, in a unique hillside waterfront community, in one of Staten Island's oldest commercial neighborhoods. Expanding that concept outside the SGSD, and literally doubling down on density without measurable community support or benefits, is beyond my comprehension.

Yes, there is a place in the street fabric of St. George for something more in scale with the community, something that will be supported by all Staten Islanders. More specifically, I am referring to the owners of historic detached homes in the St. George Historic District, the neighbors of the Castleton Park Apartments, and the owners of the many two and three-story detached homes south of Richmond Terrace. All of these stakeholders are directly affected by this new proposal - and their quality of life should be protected as their homes, just like the property in question, are all situated outside the SSGD. Finally, I agree with you that our city does not belong to any individual or set of individuals. It belongs to all the people.

This is a serious issue that will alter the fabric of this unique borough, and I look forward to discussing it with you soon.

Sincerely,

James S. Oddo

James S, Oddo
President, Borough of Staten Island

