



March 6, 2019

Testimony of the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce to the City Planning Commission

Borough of Staten Island Special Bay Street Corridor District

Application Number: CD1 C 190113 ZMR

On behalf of the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce, representing 700 businesses and 20,000 employees, I would like to express our conditional support for the rezoning of the Bay Street Corridor that includes parts of the St. George, Tompkinsville and Stapleton neighborhoods.

For many years, the Staten Island Chamber, along with many others, has advocated on behalf of a North Shore renaissance to kick-start economic development and increase the quality of life for all Staten Islanders. Well-thought-out planning and responsible development are key components in making that happen.

Recent focus by the NYC Economic Development Corporation and NYC Department of City Planning have put measures in place to improve the Downtown Staten Island waterfront community. While these efforts have been encouraging, a balanced approach to supporting community needs and future growth will be necessary as the City looks to move forward with rezoning Bay Street.

In 2016, the Chamber, in collaboration with the NYC Department of Small Business Services, conducted a Commercial District Needs Assessment of Downtown Staten Island. At that time, the study showed the area had a high 21% retail vacancy rate and highlighted that \$298.2 million is spent outside the neighborhood. The CDNA called for a better retail mix that provides basic neighborhood goods and services and reflected that there was a lot of room to grow.

The proposed rezoning suggests there will be 275,000 square feet of additional commercial space. As the area grows, it is vital that any improved zoning attracts the right types of businesses, includes resiliency measures, creates jobs and adds to the vibrancy and vitality needed along this corridor – an area that has not seen any zoning changes since 1961.

While the neighborhood is walkable and has good public transportation, the CDNA showed the need for improved infrastructure, reduced traffic and improved parking options and encouraged community connections between upland communities, Bay Street and the waterfront.

The rezoning of the Bay Street corridor cannot take place in a vacuum; it must be done in conjunction with thoughtful economic development measures and vast infrastructure and transit improvements in order to support the estimated 1,800 mixed-income apartments and over 6,500 new residents that will be brought in to the area.

During the Bloomberg administration, the City committed \$32 million to support new housing, retail and significant improvements in critical public infrastructure at the former Homeport site on Staten Island. This type of commitment must also happen in tandem with the Bay Street Corridor rezoning.

Historically, in most development scenarios on Staten Island, infrastructure improvements seem to be an afterthought. In this case, there needs to be an upfront commitment.

The Chamber recommends the following:

- Investment in the area sewer system to support future growth
- Flood resiliency measures be included in zoning framework to address increased risks from storm surges and coastal flooding
- Development and implementation of a robust traffic plan – one that includes mitigation of traffic flow and addresses the ease and impact of commercial deliveries and explores alternative delivery options via waterborne transportation
- Investment in a Fast Ferry connection to Brooklyn, bringing more access to the area by providing a direct public transit connection to Brooklyn and its subway system
- Completion of improvements slated for the Staten Island Railway Tompkinsville and Stapleton train stations
- Identification and development of better public transportation options that connect back into the Island and not just to the Ferry, as well as improved parking options
- Implementation of pedestrian streetscape improvements on Bay Street and the finger streets leading to the waterfront
- Workforce development and financial incentive programs that attract private investment as well as community benefits.

This waterfront neighborhood has tremendous potential. It has key components already in place that do not exist anywhere else on Staten Island: the Staten Island Ferry and access to Manhattan, the Staten Island Railway, and the majority of our local bus routes already run through it. With new housing, the right mix of goods and services, and improved transit, rezoning the Bay Street Corridor presents an opportunity to build upon those assets to develop a Downtown Staten Island we can all be proud of - but only if the rezoning and infrastructure investments to support it are done right!

Submitted by Linda M. Baran
President & CEO
Staten Island Chamber of Commerce

Staten Island Chamber of Commerce • PO Box 41277, Staten Island, NY 10304
(718) 727-1900 • sichamber.com