



Testimony of Roland Lewis, President and CEO

On the Redevelopment of Seaport

THE METROPOLITAN WATERFRONT ALLIANCE

Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission

Tuesday, October 21, 2008

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. I am Roland Lewis, president of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, a coalition of over 250 organizations working together to transform the New York Harbor and its waterways into a world class resource for work, play, transit and education.

Historic preservation shouldn't be just limited to discussion of the buildings or the structures, but also of the programmatic use of the space – both private and especially public. The nature of the Seaport has long been a place of exchange, much of the value that was derived from the area was linked to the numbers of people and goods passing through. Virtually all of it came in and out by water. And while General Growth's plan envisions some use of the water for water taxi transit and excursion and historic boats, it isn't enough. Even the renderings and the narrative are too limited in this regard. For as much imagination has been going into how to enliven the piazza and the possibilities of the landside public space, so should imagination, and planning go into the proactive programming of the waterfront and the water.

In addition, some portion of the money generated by any proposed development here should be dedicated to supporting the Museum, its programs, and especially the Historic Ships. According to former Planning Commissioner Don Elliot, a leader of the Seaport Speaks charette in 2006, this was the original vision of the Seaport and we should make this a front-burner question now. This serves not only historical purposes, but will also serve as a main draw for tourists and residents alike.

Essentially, the Seaport needs a makeover. It needs to finally be a place that embraces the waterfront in a way that is efficient and user-friendly. Even when the Seaport was built almost 25 years ago, it seemed as if it was better suited for a midtown location on the grid than along the historic waterfront of Lower Manhattan. The superblock footprint of Pier 17 makes the perimeter circulation along the waterfront arduous, when it should be pleasant. And the positioning and operation of the service entry along the north side of the Pier is not at all welcoming as it should be. Simple changes like this will make the area more accessible, more vibrant and more inviting to the public.

The great opportunity here, if we can make it happen, is to bring in a much higher level of authenticity to the area. Many of the storefronts that come should be not just water or marine related, but also locally owned. A great example of this can be found at Granville Island in Vancouver. Like there, we should envision a waterfront site with retail which serves the growing community of boaters from all over the harbor. Naturally, it will come to have its own New York flair and encouraging this is what is most important. We need to refocus on our Waterfront areas, such as this one, and begin to bring a true sense of community back into these invaluable spaces.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.

