

## **In Support of the BMT Vision Plan**

We start from the premise that the BMT site must be developed into something. It cannot remain the derelict storage site for containers, old trucks, piles of gravel, and concrete recycling. What should it be? Existing residents would, of course, love an extension of Brooklyn Bridge Park. But this is not what the city needs here, with the big, beautiful adjacent park, and, nice as it would be, that would be irresponsible.

The city needs housing, so it can grow, as all vital cities must. In addition, the EDC has proposed an ambitious program to modernize the feeble port and outfit it to receive mid-size ships and distribute produce on the river — the "blue highway." This model is unproven, but all bold, new ideas are unproven. If it works it will take trucks off the street and open new possibilities like greenmarkets. If it doesn't work as planned, it may need some revision, but let's not reject it because it is not guaranteed. New York City was built on bold, new ideas.

The overhaul of the site will largely be financed by housing development. We can — and should — debate the amount and types of housing that should be built. The ideal model would maintain Columbia Street density and height limits (R6A). This could be an unprecedented opportunity to actually build a beautiful new urban neighborhood in NYC: mid-rise, mid-density, with ground-floor commercial spaces, a school, cultural amenities, and open spaces. Could we have a piazza in NYC?? The waterfront development to date — in Williamsburg, Greenpoint, LIC, and others — have been a handful of towers in weak strips of park. This type of development does not foster neighborhood vitality. These residents go to the adjacent actual neighborhoods for shopping, work, and culture. But this is the type of development we are likely to see if the current process fails, because that is what has been done time and again. It is more difficult to build varied, mid-scale urban fabric. The EDC is not a profit-driven developer. The civil servants who work there are smart folks who genuinely want to improve the city and have hired good consultants. Working with them is our best chance at this once-in-a-lifetime chance to create a wonderful new district.

Yes, there are difficult issues that have not been solved. But no scheme will have solved all the issues in advance. It is an iterative process that will continue to develop long after the vote. To require every issues to be solved and guaranteed is to set an impossible bar. Transportation and traffic need to be solved, but, perhaps counter-intuitively, making big changes like the BMT development compels change and offers the opportunity to improve old problems. Facing big change is always difficult and sometimes scary. But a lot of good-faith and smart work has been put into this project to date, including the feedback of various stakeholders. We have seen time and again that adding population to an area does not make it feel overcrowded — it adds vitality. Let's continue to collaborate to develop the BMT.

— Eric Liftin  
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