

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ZONING  
AND FRANCHISES

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October 20, 2014  
Start: 10:11 a.m.  
Recess: 2:05 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: MARK S. WEPRIN  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Vincent J. Gentile  
Daniel R. Garodnick  
Jumaane D. Williams  
Ruben Wills  
Donovan J. Richards  
Antonio Reynoso  
Ritchie J. Torres  
Vincent Ignizio

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

John Mavroudis, Managing Member  
2030 Astoria Developers

Jay Valgora, Architect  
Studio V Architects

Howard Weiss, Legal Counsel  
Davidoff, Hutcher and Criton

Debra-Ellen Glickstein, Director  
Resident Economic Empowerment & Sustainability  
New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)

Philip Habib, Civil Engineer  
Philip Habib and Associates  
Planners and Engineers

Scott Stringer, Comptroller  
New York City

Eric Adams  
Brooklyn Borough President

Walter Mosley, Assembly Member  
New York State Assembly  
57th Assembly District

Melinda Katz  
Queens Borough President

John Trent,

Representative of Build Up NYC  
Hotel Trades Council

Marlon Escodo  
Astoria Resident

Maria Espinal  
Representative of Build Up NYC

Fernando Mondano  
Local 12 Heat and Frost Insulators  
Representative of Build Up NYC

Jack Friedman, Executive Director  
Queens Chamber of Commerce

Bishop Mitchell Taylor, Senior Pastor  
Center of Hope International

Alma Nevers  
Tenant in Alma Building

Justin Wood, Community Organizer  
Environmental Justice Program  
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest  
(NYLPI)

Charlene Obernauer, Executive Director  
New York Committee for Occupational  
Safety and Health (NYCOSH)

Maritza Silva-Farrell  
Lead Political Organizer  
Alliance of Greater New York (ALIGN)

Michael Ferguson, Representing

Arthur Rosenfield, President  
Long Island City- Astoria Chamber of Commerce.

Richard Khuzami, President  
Old Astoria Neighborhood Association  
Member of Community Board 1

Bruce Rosen

Audrey Sasson, Director  
Walmart-Free NYC

Leandra Arcana  
Make the Road New York

Brendan Sexton, Political Coordinator  
UFCW Local 1500  
Representing Anthony Speelman  
Secretary-Treasurer, UFCW Local 1500

Diane Kesoglu  
Old Astoria Neighborhood Association

Zach Giuseppe  
Filmmaker and Astoria Resident

Giovanni Simeone  
Representing George Roman

Kaylen Alexander  
Representing Theresa McKinney

Maria Sterling, Resident  
Brooklyn Jewish Hospital Apartments

Phyllis Hornbeck, Resident

Brooklyn Jewish Hospital Apartments

James Taylor

Woodside Apartments

2 [sound check]

3 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: We're going to get  
4 started in a couple of minutes. So if everyone could  
5 please find their seats.

6 [Pause]

7 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay. Good morning  
8 everyone. My name is Mark Weprin. I am Chair of the  
9 Zoning and Franchises Subcommittee, and I want to  
10 welcome everyone to City Hall today. I know most of  
11 you are here for the main item on our agenda, in  
12 Queens Astoria Cove. Before we get to that, we do  
13 have one cafe that we're going to be hearing in a few  
14 minutes. I want to acknowledge the members of the  
15 committee who are here with me today. Council Member  
16 Dan Garodnick, Council Member Antonio Reynoso,  
17 Council Member Vincent Ignizio. We're also joined by  
18 the Chair of the Land Use Committee David Greenfield.  
19 We also have the following members who are here on  
20 items on the agenda. I want to hear and discuss  
21 them. Council Member Laurie Cumbo, Council Member  
22 Cost Constantinides, Council Member Brad Lander, and  
23 Council Member I. Daneek Miller. I think I got  
24 everybody who is here. Yes, I did.

25

2           So first before we get to what we're  
3 going to be doing on Astoria Cove, let me take this  
4 cafe first and get that out of the way. So they  
5 don't have to stay for the rest of the day with us.  
6 I'd like to call up Ami Cohen and Telli Masaku [sp?].  
7 I don't know if I got the names right, and they are  
8 from European Bakery Cafe. Here they are. Land Use  
9 No. 122 in Council Member Corey Johnson's district.  
10 Gentlemen, if you could find your way to those  
11 microphones without touching the Power Point because  
12 that would really mess us up. Okay. Please state  
13 your name, and you can describe your application. I  
14 know there have been negotiations and discussions  
15 with the community and with Council Member Johnson  
16 already. Please state your name for the record, and  
17 describe your cafe application.

18           AMI COHEN: My name is Ami Cohen. I  
19 represent SWA Architecture, and we have a cafe on  
20 58th Street and 9th Avenue. And there was an  
21 agreement on what we can have for that cafe. I have  
22 a letter here that I would like to read into the  
23 record.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Terrific. I think I  
3 have a copy of that letter right here, too, but  
4 please read it into the record.

5 AMI COHEN: Okay. Dear Council Member  
6 Johnson, SWA Architecture as an authorized  
7 representative of Hot Bread of 58th Street,  
8 Incorporated in connection with their application for  
9 an unenclosed sidewalk cafe. Hereinafter, cafe, and  
10 on behalf of Hot Bread of 58th Street, Incorporated  
11 hereby commits to the City Council and the Zoning and  
12 Franchises Committee that in light of concerns of the  
13 surrounding community, Hot Bread of 58th Street,  
14 Incorporated shall:

- 15 1. No bikes from owner on the sidewalk.
- 16 2. Move group of tables to east as far  
17 as possible to leave more space at corner.
- 18 3. No railings at either end of cafe.
- 19 4. No seating on 9th Avenue.
- 20 5. All tables to be 20 inches by 20  
21 inches.
- 22 6. Shall have a reduced number of six  
23 tables and 12 seats.
- 24 7. No A-frame.



2 8. Front door shall not be used for  
3 later access.

4 9. Waiter service should be the new  
5 door on West 58th Street.

6 10. Beer and wine application will be  
7 filed.

8 11. The sidewalk cafe operating hours  
9 shall be Monday through Thursday 8:00 a.m. to 10:00  
10 p.m., Friday and Saturday, 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.,  
11 and Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

12 And if there are any other questions,  
13 please call my office. Thank you. Sincerely,  
14 Shromer Vigoda, Registered Architect.

15 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Terrific. We  
16 understand that you've had a lot of these discussions  
17 with Council Member Johnson on behalf of the  
18 community. From what I'm told, Council Member  
19 Johnson is okay with these changes. So we appreciate  
20 your cooperation in this. Do any members of the  
21 committee or other members have questions for this  
22 gentleman about the cafe in Council Member Johnson's  
23 district? I see none. So thank you very much,  
24 gentlemen. We appreciate you taking the time.

25 AMI COHEN: Okay, thank you very much.

2 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Anyone else here to  
3 testify on this matter on behalf of European Bakery  
4 Cafe? Seeing none, we thank you very much. We're  
5 going to close this public hearing, and we'll be  
6 taking the vote a little later probably in the  
7 hearing.

8 We've been joined I understand by Public  
9 Advocate Tish James, who I didn't see nor hear, which  
10 the second part is unusual, you know. And how are  
11 you Tish? It's good to see you here. [laughs] And  
12 again, good morning, everyone. I want to just  
13 discuss some of the parameters of what we'll be doing  
14 here today. I also want to acknowledge that we do  
15 have translation services available in Spanish for  
16 those who might need to be translated from Espanol  
17 into English. So a little public service  
18 announcement.

19 So, today we're going to be hearing an  
20 application on Astoria Cove. And just so you know  
21 what we're going to be doing, we are going to call  
22 the applicant up to make a presentation. As you see,  
23 he has a Power Point and their group has a Power  
24 Point and charts. We will hear from them. Members  
25 of the committee will be asking questions. This will

2 probably take some time because we have a lot of  
3 issues that we want to see addressed.

4           Then following that, there will be a  
5 number of elected officials who are here who want to  
6 testify on behalf of their-- of the community and  
7 their constituents. And then we are going to go to  
8 alternate panels between those in favor of the  
9 project, and those against the project. And we will  
10 bring people up probably four at a time, and each  
11 person unfortunately will be limited to about two  
12 minutes. I know that doesn't sound like a lot, but  
13 you can get a lot out in two minutes if you  
14 coordinate yourself. And go through your notes and  
15 try to take the highlights and bring those up. I  
16 apologize that we have to do that, but that's the  
17 only way to keep it moving to make sure everyone is  
18 going to be heard. And that is why we're here today.  
19 We're here to hear from the developer, to learn about  
20 the development and what they're proposing. Then  
21 hear from everyone, and it's our goal to have  
22 everyone who wants to testify to speak and to be  
23 heard. So we're going to do that.

24           I do want to remind people that the  
25 application before us is on Astoria Cove. I know

2 there are a lot of other issues that are out there,  
3 and a lot of other people who have opinions on this  
4 subject. But the matter before the City Council  
5 today is the application on Astoria Cove. And just  
6 to reiterate that that application includes the  
7 zoning special permits, the rezoning action, and the  
8 Zoning Amendment, the City Map amendment and the  
9 Waterfront Authorization. So with that in mind, I'd  
10 like to get started. I know the Sergeant-at-Arms had  
11 warned you, and he's very tough over there, that we  
12 can't have any outbreaks. So please no applause of  
13 booing or cheering or anything else during the  
14 hearing. Otherwise, we may have to have the  
15 Sergeant-at-Arms ask you to leave, and we don't want  
16 to have to do that.

17 So with that in mind, we're going to get  
18 started. On behalf of the applicant, John Mavroudis  
19 is here, Deborah Ellen-- Debra-Allen Glickstein, Jay  
20 Valgora, and Howard Weiss. And look at that. Is  
21 everyone there? Okay.

22 [Pause]

23 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Good morning Chairman  
24 Weprin--

2 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: One second. Don't  
3 get started yet. What I'd like to do is-- I  
4 apologize. We're going to let Council Member Costa  
5 Constantinides, who is the council member who  
6 represents this project to make an opening statement  
7 first because this is in his district. Council  
8 Member Constantinides.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Thank you  
10 Chairman Weprin. Good morning, everyone. The two  
11 questions surrounding Astoria Cove today is what this  
12 development will be? Will it be fully integrated  
13 into our community, a development that lifts all  
14 boats and results in positive change? Or, will it be  
15 a castle with a moat around it that only those that  
16 live in it will have it for a benefit? I fully  
17 support the development in my community, but it must  
18 be responsible, and positively add to the character  
19 of our neighborhood. As currently composed, I have  
20 serious questions about the Astoria Cove project.

21 Community Board 1 voted unanimously, 44  
22 to nothing, recommended that it be considered for  
23 approval by the city only if the developer pledged to  
24 increase affordability, make meaningful  
25 transportation upgrades, and provide safe and good

2 jobs as part of the construction and operation of the  
3 buildings.

4 Queens Borough President Linda Katz also  
5 recommended this project's rejection based on similar  
6 concerns relating to affordability, transportation,  
7 and good jobs. As currently constructed, the  
8 developer has the ability to construct this project  
9 with AMI numbers that do not fit the average income  
10 of my neighborhood. Astoria is experiencing great  
11 growth and success, but the average income is about  
12 \$56,000 a year or 74% of the AMI. I can't tell you  
13 how many times I've heard my constituents say,  
14 Councilman, I've lived in Astoria my entire life. I  
15 love living here. Please help me stay. Astoria Cove  
16 has to have real affordability that is within the  
17 reach of every Astorian.

18 Under the current Zoning Tax, the  
19 developer has the option to build on 10% of the units  
20 at 80% AMI. With the other units remaining  
21 affordable, units could go up to 175 AMI. That's the  
22 equivalent of paying \$2,700 a month for a one-bedroom  
23 or \$3,000 a month for a three-bedroom. Not only is  
24 this not affordable, but these rates are actually  
25 above market for the mass majority of my community.

1    Until Astoria Cove is made affordable for actual  
2    Astorians, I cannot support this project. This  
3    project also represents a major challenge to an  
4    already over-burdened transit network. Last year,  
5    the Council approved the Hallet's Point Proposal that  
6    will add over 2,000 units to the Hallet's Cove  
7    Peninsula, and Astoria Cove proposes to add another  
8    1,700 units. Introducing close to 4,000 additional  
9    units will overwhelm the existing transit network.  
10   And this problem will not be solved by simply running  
11   shuttle buses to the local train stations.

12                   Moreover, the residents of the Hallet's  
13   Cove Peninsula are far enough away from existing  
14   transit that their commute is much longer than any  
15   other point in my neighborhood. If this plan is to  
16   work, it must include meaningful transportation  
17   upgrades, and new options such as ferry service that  
18   benefits current and future residents of the  
19   Peninsula alike. We have an opportunity for this  
20   development to provide good jobs. We must not let it  
21   pass. The construction must be done to the highest  
22   standards. Real safety standards must be in place  
23   throughout the construction, and full compliance with  
24   all safety requirements must be a priority. There  
25

2 must be a living wage and good jobs with benefits  
3 during the construction phase and after to ensure  
4 that this development provides a real window to the  
5 middle-class in our community.

6           It is imperative that there must be  
7 equitable development associated with this project,  
8 and we cannot overlook the needs of the residents of  
9 the Astoria Houses. For decades, the Hallet's Cove  
10 Peninsula has struggled, lacking basic amenities such  
11 as schools supermarkets, doctors and dentists  
12 offices. If done right, we can safeguard the small  
13 business character of our community by helping  
14 residents build businesses here, and grow businesses.  
15 We must also look to foster worker cooperatives, and  
16 other meaningful ways of bringing people into middle-  
17 class.

18           Finally, we must create a local working  
19 group that is designed to hear the concerns of the  
20 community, and work with them to resolve the problems  
21 as they arise. The Astoria Cove Development has the  
22 potential to be transformative for our neighborhood.  
23 If we find the right mix of affordable housing,  
24 meaningful transportation upgrades, the creation for  
25 opportunities for good jobs and business ownership, I



2 could support this project. The developments in our  
3 communities must be responsible and cognizant of the  
4 needs of its neighbors. As currently configured, I  
5 do not feel the current Astoria Cove Project meets  
6 these standards necessary for approval. I look  
7 forward to hearing from the community today, the  
8 developer, and all interested parties in this matter.  
9 I am working as hard as I can over the course of the  
10 next several weeks to see if we can create a project  
11 that will be a lasting and positive addition to this  
12 great neighborhood. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Council  
14 Member. With that whenever you guys are ready.  
15 Please make sure-- One thing I want to be clear for  
16 the record, whenever you speak, please state your  
17 name before you speak. The reason we do that is to  
18 keep-- If someone was to read the record, they will  
19 know who is speaking. They're not going to see you.  
20 So after you speak if later on during questions  
21 before you answer a question, if more than one of you  
22 will be answering, please state your name before you  
23 speak each time. Okay. Mr. Mavroudis, whenever  
24 you're ready.

2 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Thank you. My name is  
3 John Mavroudis. I'm the Managing Member of 2030  
4 Astoria Developers, the developer of Astoria Cove.  
5 Good morning, Chairman Weprin, members of the  
6 committee, Public Advocate James, and Council Member  
7 Constantinides. We're happy to be here today and to  
8 have the opportunity to present our project to you.  
9 The entire project team is here today to answer any  
10 question you may have, and address any concerns that  
11 you may be thinking about. At this point, I'm going  
12 to turn the presentation over to Jay Valgora. He's  
13 the project's Architect and Master Planner, and he's  
14 going to go over the physical aspects of the project.

15 JAY VALGORA: My name is Jay Valgora.  
16 I'm Principal and Founder of Studio V Architecture.  
17 I am a certified planner in the State of New York, a  
18 licensed architect. And, my firm is responsible for  
19 doing many extensive projects especially on the New  
20 York waterfront and reinventing communities. We're  
21 proud of the role we're playing in really re-  
22 imagining the New York Waterfront.

23 This project that we're showing you today  
24 is the culmination of over four year's work reaching  
25 out to the community, meeting in the churches,

1 meeting the residents of the NYCHA campus. It's very  
2 important to us that we have worked hard to try to  
3 listen to the community, understand their needs, and  
4 incorporate them into the project. And, it will be  
5 for you to judge, but I will try to describe the  
6 design and how we have worked. And I personally have  
7 worked closely with the community along with many  
8 other fine consultants here. Our world famous  
9 landscape architect Ken Smith. Some of the best  
10 engineers, Philip Habib and Associates. A whole  
11 variety of professionals have committed enormous  
12 effort over several years to try to realize a  
13 transformative project for Astoria Cove.  
14

15 Today, there are no stores on the Astoria  
16 Cove site, and even in this community. There are  
17 very few streets. Many of the streets are actually  
18 closed down. There is no bank, no supermarket, and  
19 no hardware store. There are fences completely  
20 surrounding this area, and cutting it off from the  
21 waterfront. So we're going to show you a vision for  
22 this community that is very, very different from  
23 that. And that tries to incorporate stores, housing,  
24 affordable housing, a supermarket, a site for a  
25 school, a playground, major waterfront parks, and

2 more resiliency measures to protect this  
3 neighborhood. All of that is something I'm going to  
4 show you. So I'm going to get up.

5 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Before you start, I  
6 just want to announce that we've been joined by  
7 Vincent Gentile, Council Member Vincent Gentile from  
8 Brooklyn.

9 JAY VALGORA: Okay, is this working?  
10 This is our site on the Hallet's Point Peninsula.  
11 Neal, go to the next one. Now, this is where we are  
12 in the larger context of New York. It's interesting.  
13 This whole area around Astoria, you know, we all know  
14 Astoria. We know the neighborhood of Astoria so  
15 well. But this is the part of Astoria that it seems  
16 many people have forgotten. Many people live here  
17 and yet it's an unusual place. It used to be the  
18 gateway to Astoria. It used to be the front door to  
19 Astoria, and today it's a place that has cut off  
20 streets, fences, and crumbling warehouses with very  
21 little use. Keep going. So this is a close-up that  
22 actually shows the Hallet's Point Peninsula. It's a  
23 very unusual community by New York standards. It's  
24 very divided by different components. It's somewhat  
25 isolated on the peninsula.

2 Astoria houses, the New York City Housing  
3 Campus, makes up nearly half of the total land. This  
4 entire area is a very disparate fabric largely made  
5 up of empty warehouses, almost no housing. So today,  
6 you have empty buildings sitting on the waterfront,  
7 very few jobs being created by that. And almost all  
8 of the housing in the community is actually the New  
9 York City Housing Authority campus, which is a form  
10 of affordable housing. Next. So what we're  
11 proposing is actually reconnecting it to the  
12 community and the work to do this is actually  
13 tremendous. We have to build huge amounts of  
14 streets. We have to build a tremendous amount of  
15 infrastructure. All of these lines and arrows you  
16 can see here-- Sorry. I guess I should speak to you  
17 guys.

18 MALE SPEAKER: Should I stand on the  
19 side?

20 JAY VALGORA: You can start to see where  
21 we have to really build most of the infrastructure.  
22 Normally, when you do a project in New York City the  
23 streets are there, the infrastructure is there. We  
24 have to create most of that. So, for example, this  
25 is 4th Street, but 4th Street just stops here with a

2 fence. And this is a new street that's going to  
3 connect it to the waterfront that we have to build.  
4 I'm going to show you a picture of that. This is a  
5 waterfront, which is cut off with a fence. We're  
6 building a new waterfront street that's going to be  
7 lined with restaurants and shops. This is 8th  
8 Street. Today it's a dirt path that trucks go down.  
9 It's a mapped street. We're going to create a new  
10 garden street. It actually has to be a garden  
11 because it's too steep to drive trucks down.

12           So we're going to create a beautiful  
13 stepped street that's all about taking the NYCHA  
14 residents and inviting them into the development.  
15 Not creating a note, but creating connections so that  
16 we can bring them in. And finally, 26th Avenue is  
17 going to be our neighborhood street. Today that's a  
18 fence in front of it. It's closed off, and we're  
19 going to create a new neighborhood street lined with  
20 shops, restaurants, and a new school, and a  
21 supermarket on that street that does not exist today.

22           Go to the next one, please. So this  
23 shows-- This is one of these kind of land use maps  
24 that shows all the different uses, but it shows the  
25 disparity in the uses today. The kind of yellow

1 color over here is housing, and that's primarily the  
2 NYCHA campus. This sort of pink/purple color up here  
3 represents manufacturing, and these are basically  
4 empty warehouses. And there is one last pocket of  
5 manufacturing here that does not fit in with the  
6 residential character of the neighborhood.  
7

8           Next. So this is a zoning diagram, which  
9 shows the existing and the proposed zoning, and you  
10 can see here again this disparity between R6  
11 residential zoning and N11 in this one little pocket.  
12 And basically, we're talking about a very nuanced  
13 zoning approach, which we worked closely with City  
14 Planning, and received a great deal of help and  
15 assistance from them. In order to step down amassing  
16 what actually creates slightly higher density towards  
17 the waterfront and towards the open space where we're  
18 creating a major park. And then feathering massing  
19 down into the community to create appropriately  
20 scaled buildings.

21           Next. These are the overall facts and  
22 figures. I'm sorry they're a little bit small, and I  
23 know the Council has most of these. But basically,  
24 the project lot area is about 377,000 square feet.  
25 The proposed total zoning floor area is about 1.7

2 million square feet. Of this, residential will  
3 comprise 1.6 million. Commercial is a key component  
4 where we're doing small scale Use Group 6 commercial  
5 and a supermarket about 55,000 square feet. And  
6 there providing a major site for a school that is  
7 60,000 square feet. The total dwelling unit count is  
8 1,723. We're proposing 345 units of affordable  
9 housing, and this is Queens. We've got to have  
10 parking. Parking is important. We're going to have  
11 parking on the interior of the blocks wrapped above  
12 the water table for about 900 cars.

13           Next. So this is a phasing plan, and one  
14 of the most important parts is that all of the public  
15 benefits of the project will occur as the project is  
16 built at every single stage. So, for example, it  
17 shows Phase 1 being built here. But already we've  
18 got to create a whole network of streets right in the  
19 very beginning of it. Phase 2 comes here and all the  
20 waterfront parks and public spaces and the amenities  
21 are built with every single phase. Phase 3 is here  
22 an Phase 4 is here. And so, the idea is that every  
23 single stage we have to build the public amenities  
24 that go with those phases and are incorporated from  
25 the beginning.



2           Next. This is an overall roof plan, and  
3 I guess it's hard for you to see. I'll go to some  
4 three-dimensional drawings in a minute that are going  
5 to explain it a little bit better. But basically,  
6 the towers are varied in size. They're varied in  
7 height. They have an organic feel. They're not  
8 regimented. They have different shapes and  
9 configurations to fit into the neighborhood. This  
10 major diagonal street, and this new garden street are  
11 all about creating access to the waterfront that  
12 today is fenced off, cut off, not accessible to  
13 anyone. And making that into a permanent public open  
14 space with a playground and trees and extensive  
15 plantings by a world-class landscape architect.

16           Next. This is the overall massing that  
17 shows the project. Looking from the southwest, you  
18 can see how the towers are pushed up along the  
19 waterfront. There is a very delicate and finely  
20 grained approach to the massing that steps down  
21 towards the surrounding community here. And  
22 extensive new streets. This is the new street of 4th  
23 Street, the new waterfront park and our new community  
24 street on 26th Avenue. This is the location of the  
25 school that we've worked closely with the School

2 Construction Authority to make sure that it's a very  
3 good site. That it has a playground. That it has  
4 play areas. That it's incorporated into our street.  
5 That there is room for all the classrooms. That  
6 there is room for the buses. This has been  
7 extensively coordinated. And the developer is giving  
8 this site for a dollar to the school, even though  
9 their project doesn't generate the full need for the  
10 school. And the school will support more people in  
11 the neighborhood even though they only generate a  
12 small portion of it.

13           Next. This is a view looking from the  
14 water. And from the water, you can see how the  
15 massing steps back considerably. We provided a  
16 larger waterfront park than what's required. It's  
17 almost twice as large than what is required. Here  
18 you can see 4th Street. 4th Street is this new  
19 street that's all about bringing people down to the  
20 waterfront. Here is 26th with our new school. At  
21 the end of 9th Street, we've done an extensive study  
22 and provided that as a location for a future water  
23 taxi. We don't control the City ferry system. We  
24 can't tell them they have to be there, but at the  
25 developer's expense, we provided a full study showing

2 that we could create a full water taxi location here,  
3 if the City designates that. And my firm is one of  
4 the firms that actually works for the City  
5 Administration. Our firm is designated as one of the  
6 on-call firms for the EDC. And as a follow-up from  
7 that study, the City has designated that as a future  
8 water taxi stop. So we can't tell them to put them  
9 in there, but we've done everything possible to  
10 provide the place, to provide the study, to get it on  
11 the City map. That's ready to happen if the City  
12 wants it to happen. And we've done all of the work  
13 for them.

14           Next. This is an interesting diagram,  
15 and it tells you something that I think will be  
16 transformative for this community. This is a larger  
17 diagram of Hallet's Point, and in the City's Long-  
18 Term Waterfront Plan, and this was identified as one  
19 of the most challenging areas and neighborhoods,  
20 communities to create continuous waterfront access.  
21 But what we're showing here is that along with the  
22 approved Hallet's Point Esplanade, which is already  
23 approved in law for the City, if you approve the  
24 Astoria Cove Esplanade here, you have the opportunity  
25 to create nearly a continuous waterfront park on the

2 entire Astoria Waterfront that is unprecedented, and  
3 would have been thought almost impossible with our  
4 lifetime. From Randy Park to connection around the  
5 coast, Socrates Sculpture Park along the road;  
6 Goodwill Park, Astoria Houses Esplanade, Astoria  
7 Houses Playground, Hallet's Point, Whitey Ford Field.  
8 One of the last missing links in a continuous green  
9 waterfront park and open space network with the  
10 Astoria Cove. And the two remaining sites that are  
11 there, are already working with my firm, and will  
12 come before the City Council. Especially, they're  
13 going to be watching this case to see if this case  
14 succeeds. And if the Council wants to support  
15 development that will create a continuous network of  
16 parks all the way from Rainy Park to Astoria Park,  
17 that would have been almost un-thought of within our  
18 generation. That will happen in the next few years  
19 in this administration if you support the project.  
20 That is waiting to happen.

21           Next. This shows you some of that  
22 waterfront open space access. This kind of dark  
23 green area here is meant to show you that that's  
24 really what's required for the park. But this area  
25 that goes back all the way into the pink and the

2 lighter green, shows you that we made the park twice  
3 as big as it was required to be made. We had the  
4 opportunity. We had a deeper site, and the developer  
5 said, Let's actually provide more open space. This  
6 is a community that could use it. We're providing  
7 nearly 40% of the total land area as open public  
8 space; parks and streets, and greenery that I'm going  
9 to show you. That in my experience is almost  
10 unprecedented for a project of this scale. The  
11 tremendous amount of work, investment,  
12 infrastructure, and open space is nearly  
13 unprecedented in addition to these streets here and  
14 these green areas here.

15           Next. This is kind of a ground floor  
16 thing. And it's colored in because it allows you to  
17 see what some of the different uses are. So, for  
18 example, all this kind of orange stuff that's retail,  
19 and what that's meant to communicate is these are  
20 active edges. This is a community that needs  
21 amenities. When I meet with Claudia Clover and she  
22 says, Well, what my residents really need, they need  
23 shops. They need a bank. They need a supermarket.  
24 They need a hardware store. They need a pizza place  
25 and coffee shop. That's what these are, small-scale

2 retail. No big box. All creating local jobs, local  
3 benefits, and local amenities as well as a more  
4 significant supermarket. And this yellow stuff over  
5 here is actually residences where we're creating kind  
6 of town houses built into the edges. So that all the  
7 edges are activated and creating eyes on the street,  
8 and creating a sense of a community where today you  
9 have fences and blank walls.

10 Finally, the parking is in the center of  
11 the development. It actually means that it's  
12 protected. It's kind of hidden. We have to provide  
13 a lot of parking, but it's done in a very sensitive  
14 way where all the edges facing onto the public spaces  
15 in the streets are activated.

16 Next. This shows you a view down that  
17 8th kind of garden that I told you about. We're  
18 calling it the news [sic], but it's really a  
19 beautiful garden because this is too steep. You  
20 know, Philip, our engineer said, Jay, you can't drive  
21 cars down that. It's not safe. That's the  
22 topography today. So we said, Why don't we make it  
23 into a beautiful pedestrian street that extends up to  
24 the NYCHA campus that actually encourages everyone to  
25 come to the waterfront, not creating a moat, creating

2 connectivity. Very expensive beautiful green  
3 streets, and it captures the rainwater. It's more  
4 resilient, too.

5           Next. This is a section through the  
6 shore public walkway, and you can see how it's  
7 unusually wide. Typically, it's only about 40 feet  
8 wide. We've made it over 80 feet in terms of its  
9 typical width having a double row of trees. And we  
10 worked closely with Ken Smith and his people who  
11 wanted to do something extraordinary. He spoke about  
12 the rockeries. He spoke about making the edge more  
13 resilient, putting a grip wrap, but not just making  
14 it a hard edge, not just making it safer and armoring  
15 it. But putting plantings all through here, which  
16 I'm going to show you. Creating a beautiful,  
17 magnificent crescent with a double row of London  
18 plane trees. Beautiful traditional trees within New  
19 York. Creating a wonderful small roadway that's  
20 covered with cobblestones with no curb that allows  
21 access neighborhood restaurants and cafes. You know,  
22 our applicant John grew up in Astoria, and they  
23 wanted to create small local restaurants and cafes  
24 all along the waterfront to activate that edge, and

2 to extend the unique character of Astoria right to  
3 the waterfront.

4           Next. This shows you an existing view of  
5 the site today. We're near the end so I'm going to  
6 show you the perspectives. This shows you today  
7 empty warehouses, crumbling infrastructure, fenced  
8 off streets that aren't there today. No access to  
9 the waterfront. This area, which looks green, is  
10 just weeds and trees growing there with fences around  
11 it. And if you go to the next this is what's  
12 proposed for that same view. A major waterfront  
13 park, new streets, school, supermarket. All about  
14 connecting and bringing people to the waterfront.

15           Next. This is a view of the waterfront  
16 today. It's dirt, gravel. It has piles of random  
17 boulders, and yet you have these magnificent views of  
18 the Triborough Bridge and the Hells Gate Bridge.  
19 Today, there is no access to this waterfront. It's  
20 surrounded by fences and padlocks.

21           Next. This is 4th Street that's going to  
22 connect all the way from 26th Avenue and in a similar  
23 view bring you down. It actually points right  
24 towards that view of the Hells Gate Bridge. It  
25 encourages and welcomes and brings you to the



2 waterfront lined with all small local shops and  
3 restaurants and beautiful street trees. This is  
4 actually the new gateway to the waterfront that  
5 connects everyone and brings them there.

6 Next. Finally, this is an existing view  
7 of the waterfront. You can see today the kind of  
8 weeds and scrabble, the empty warehouses that aren't  
9 contributing any jobs.

10 Next. This is a view of that proposed  
11 waterfront park and esplanade. Here you can see the  
12 double rows of trees, the restaurants and cafes that  
13 line the edges. All of this has to be built from  
14 scratch. There's no street, no infrastructure, no  
15 schools. All of this is going to be provided by the  
16 developer.

17 Next. And then finally, the existing  
18 view of 26th Avenue. 26th Avenue has been cut off  
19 for decades. The street is closed. There are fences  
20 in front of it, and this is going to be the 8th  
21 Street News that creates that new connection that  
22 actually reties together the different levels. That  
23 actually has housing along it, and these beautiful  
24 stepped gardens that collect all the rainwater and  
25

2 channel it into greenery and create a new benchmark  
3 for a sustainable development.

4           The last one this is the view of 26th  
5 Avenue. This is the chain link fence that separates  
6 it from the community. This is actually looking  
7 towards the west, towards the city. And the proposed  
8 26th Avenue has a major supermarket. It's going to  
9 be part of the city's Fresh Program offering fresh  
10 fruits and vegetables. There is one over-priced deli  
11 in this community today that's more expensive than  
12 any deli that I could go to in Manhattan where you  
13 can't even get a cup of coffee. There is nowhere to  
14 buy things. There are no amenities. When I meet in  
15 the churches with the residents, they tell me, Give  
16 us a supermarket. Give us a place where we can buy  
17 affordable food for our families. Give us a bank so  
18 we don't have to go to check cashing places. This is  
19 the street that's going to have all the neighborhood  
20 amenities, a small bank, a hardware store, a  
21 supermarket, and a school for their children.

22           So in conclusion, you have a choice in  
23 front of you. Four of years of work have been done  
24 in working with the community, and listening to their  
25 concerns. And trying to offer a balanced development

2 that will relate to the needs of Astoria, and the  
3 special characteristics that make Astoria unique.  
4 And we're proud to present this project to you today  
5 to take down the fences, take down these crumbling  
6 warehouses, and replace them with a beautiful mixed-  
7 use community that offers amenities to the people who  
8 live there. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you very much.  
10 Mr. Weiss, do you want to go now.

11 HOWARD WEISS: Yes, sir.

12 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay. Make sure you  
13 say your name anyway.

14 HOWARD WEISS: Good morning, Mr. Chair,  
15 Council members. Howard Weiss. I'm a member of  
16 Davidoff, Hutcher, and Criton. We are project  
17 counsel, and I join Mr. Mavroudis in expressing my  
18 pleasure to be here this morning. It's been a long  
19 road, but a road that we're very glad to have  
20 traveled to bring us to today. I'm going to briefly  
21 talk about the zoning actions that are before you,  
22 and as well talk about the Zoning Text Amendments  
23 that lead us to what is for this project a  
24 groundbreaking inclusionary housing proposal.  
25 Nothing that the City has ever seen before in terms

2 of inclusiveness and in terms of opportunity for  
3 affordable housing at the City's waterfront.

4           The actions that are before you are  
5 actually typical of the kinds of zoning actions  
6 you've seen for these large-scale waterfront  
7 developments. A zoning map amendment that would  
8 change the existing zoning from N11 and R6 to R7, R7A  
9 and R6B to provide for a contextual development, a  
10 development that also would foster mixed-use  
11 including both inclusionary housing and marketable  
12 house. Zoning Text Amendment that relate to the  
13 affordable housing Inclusionary Housing Program,  
14 which I'm going to address shortly. A large-scale  
15 special permit that allows certain zoning waivers as  
16 well as a waterfront special permit on the waterfront  
17 park that allows waivers. That are provided for in  
18 the Zoning Resolution that then allows a design team  
19 and a developer to propose creatively the kind of  
20 development that Jay presented to us this morning.  
21 There are authorizations to modify the waterfront  
22 regulations, and that's something-- It's a tool that  
23 Ken Smith worked with, with his team to create what  
24 is I think one of the most spectacular waterfront  
25 parks among the waterfront large scale projects that

2 have before Council probably within the last decade.

3 As certification by the chairperson that the

4 waterfront park that is before you, in fact, complies

5 with the waterfront regulations as modified by our

6 authorizations. And the city map changed to create

7 the street grid that was presented by Jay Valgora

8 that allows for the access to the site that you've

9 seen this morning.

10 In terms of the text amendment in the

11 project's affordable housing, as I said, this project

12 is trailblazing. It gives voice to the Mayor's 10-

13 Year Housing Plan, and it gives voice I think a lot

14 of what has been discussed in recent years. But in

15 particular with the advent of this new

16 administration, this new council which is

17 particularly focused on economic opportunity

18 inclusiveness. It's a zoning text that for the first

19 time will make affordable housing mandatory. For the

20 first time in the history of the city when this

21 Council approves this project, if the Council

22 approves this project, the developer will have to

23 provide affordable housing. If one unit of residence

24 is to be developed that has never happened before in

25 this town. Previously on the prior projects the

1 zoning texts allowed a developer to avail itself of  
2 the Zoning Map Amendment to modify the zoning, to  
3 create residential or manufacturing zoning permitted  
4 with a bonus for affordable housing. But it was at  
5 a developer's option at the end of the day whether or  
6 not then to actually develop with the inclusionary  
7 housing bonus. And if a developer elected to do so,  
8 then the developer would go forward and develop  
9 housing without any affordability.  
10

11           With respect to Astoria Cove, working  
12 with the Administration and the City Planning, we  
13 proposed now a text amendment that makes it  
14 mandatory. Not only is it mandatory under the new  
15 text, applicable to this project for the first time,  
16 this going to be 20% of affordable housing without  
17 public subsidy. It's all on the developer's dime.  
18 If, in fact, down the road the developer should elect  
19 to request public subsidy to help support the  
20 affordable housing, then it will be within the  
21 discretion of City Planning working with HPD to  
22 increase the proportion of affordable housing beyond  
23 the 20% that's in the present zoning text.

24           Significant as well is the fact that the  
25 affordable housing will be at 20% low income, and a

2 maximum 80% AMI if the developer should look to reach  
3 a higher band of affordability. And there's been  
4 talk as advocates and stakeholders have looked at the  
5 future of affordability in this town and affordable  
6 housing, there's been talk about not only reaching  
7 lower bands, but reaching higher bands of  
8 affordability. And this zoning text contemplates  
9 that going forward if a higher band should be  
10 reached, for example, moderate income, then there  
11 would have to be at least 10% low income. And it  
12 would increase the proportion of affordable housing  
13 by another 15%. So you have a total of 25% in order  
14 to reach a higher band.

15           However, I think what needs to be  
16 stressed is that although that's a technical  
17 construct that was provided in the zoning text, it's  
18 applicable only to this site. And I think that needs  
19 to be emphasized as well that this project came into  
20 ULURP, and was certified at a point in time where the  
21 dialogue on the part of this administration and this  
22 Council regarding affordable housing was in embryonic  
23 stages. But yet the ULURP clock was ticking. So  
24 what we did was working with the Administration and  
25 City Planning is we agreed to propose zoning text

2 that will be applicable to this site. We think that  
3 what we're doing here will become a model, or at  
4 least a portal to the future in terms of how the  
5 Administration and this Council can approach  
6 affordable housing. And create better opportunities,  
7 and greater inclusiveness in terms of affordability.  
8 But right now, what you're being asked to approve is  
9 applicable only to this development, and is a  
10 commitment only being made by this developer. And if  
11 approved, this project as proposed, and I think this  
12 is what I need to close with. It's extremely  
13 important. This project involves 20% at the low-  
14 income band at a maximum of 80% AMI without public  
15 subsidy. Permanent affordability spread out  
16 throughout the entire project--

17 I think that's the other thing I need to  
18 emphasize. From day one there was no poor doors on  
19 this project. The affordable units are going to be  
20 disbursed throughout the project. And all the  
21 amenities in this project that are available to  
22 market rate occupants in this project will equally be  
23 available to those residing in the affordable units.  
24 And, in fact, someone walking into this development  
25 will not be able to discern who is in an affordable



1 unit, and who is in a market rate unit. Because this  
2 project is being designed to be totally inclusive and  
3 to be totally egalitarian in terms of the way it  
4 treats both those in the affordable units and those  
5 in the market rate units. With that, I'd like to  
6 thank you for your time, and I'm going to turn this  
7 over now to Debra-Ellen Glickstein, who is going to  
8 talk about how this project is connecting to the  
9 community.  
10

11 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Ms. Glickstein,  
12 before you set up, I just-- We have to vote on the  
13 cafe we heard before, and I'm just going to quickly  
14 interrupt the proceedings, and ask the clerk to call  
15 the roll on Land Use No. 122, Sidewalk Cafe, European  
16 Bakery Cafe. I'd liked to call on Ann McCoy to  
17 please call the roll.

18 CLERK: Chair Weprin.

19 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Yes.

20 CLERK: Council Member Gentile.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: [off mic] I vote  
22 aye.

23 CLERK: Council Member Garodnick.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Aye.

25 CLERK: Council Member Reynoso.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: Aye.

3 CLERK: Council Member Ignizio.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: Aye.

5 CLERK: By a vote of 5 in the affirmative  
6 0 abstentions and no negatives, Land Use Item 122 is  
7 approved and referred to the Full Land Use Committee.

8 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you and I  
9 apologize, Ms. Glickstein.

10 DEBRA-ELLEN GLICKSTEIN: Hi. Good  
11 morning. My name is Debra-Ellen Glickstein, and I'm  
12 actually very excited to be here to talk about the  
13 community connections in this project. I'm building  
14 off really what Jay talked about in terms of, you  
15 know, we talked a lot about the physical connections  
16 and the relations in particular between Astoria  
17 Houses community, a community of 3,000 public housing  
18 residents on the broader peninsula.

19 We spent a lot of time over the last year  
20 and myself more recently over the last few months  
21 thinking really how can we create a model where a  
22 poor development in public housing communities and  
23 the greater Astoria where they're actually a  
24 meaningful and systematic connections not just  
25 physical for these communities? And so I'm going to

1 take some time and talk about three sort of main  
2 specific elements of this. Again, this is on top of  
3 the connections that Jay talked about that were  
4 physical.  
5

6 So one, we want to talk about the local  
7 hiring. Now, there are going to be hundreds of  
8 construction and permanent jobs coming into this  
9 project. As I know the City Council knows what's  
10 really unique about Astoria is it is actually a site,  
11 a jobs plus sites. There are only eight jobs plus  
12 sites in New York City. These are sites that are  
13 focused on creating meaningful careers for public  
14 housing communities. So the developer is very  
15 excited to partner with this jobs plus site to make  
16 sure that there are priorities for local hiring. And  
17 in particular, hiring for Astoria Housing residents  
18 that are connected again to the construction jobs,  
19 which will hopefully be good union jobs and connected  
20 to the permanent jobs as well.

21 Secondly, talking about the affordable  
22 housing priority. Now, the developer has committed  
23 to exploring further with HPD and City how we can  
24 think about creating upwardly mobile opportunities  
25 for Astoria Houses residents. So figuring out a way

1 to create priority for Astoria Houses residents a  
2 portion of those affordable housing units. Thereby  
3 that would also free up existing-- Those existing  
4 NYCHA units and free up for other people to  
5 transition into those units.  
6

7 Connected to that, we are also excited to  
8 explore different credit options. And I know this is  
9 something the City Council has worked hard on in the  
10 past. Thinking about how often times a resident may  
11 actually qualify for the lottery, but their credit  
12 score or a lack thereof of their credit score may  
13 actually inhibit them from actually getting an  
14 affordable unit. So that is absolutely something  
15 that we don't want to see here for residents that  
16 would actually be excellent tenants. So the  
17 developer is committed to exploring not only using a  
18 credit score, but thinking about potentially past  
19 rental payments as a proxy for that credit option.

20 So the third element I want to talk about  
21 that is really exciting, and also builds on the City  
22 Council's work is creating and fostering in our work  
23 with Council Member Cost Constantinides around the  
24 creation of cooperative businesses in the Peninsula.  
25 This builds on the \$1.2 million that the City Council

2 has committed to create a network of cooperatives  
3 across the city as well as the innovative work of  
4 Urban Outbounds getting a small business innovation  
5 award. So the developer has committed that the Fresh  
6 Supermarket, that Jay spoke about, that that will  
7 actually be a cooperative business, a cooperative  
8 supermarket. That will be owned and run ultimately  
9 in part by residents of Astoria Houses, which is  
10 absolutely awesome. He has committed to not only  
11 paying for the upfront costs of that supermarket, but  
12 also the transition costs. So hopefully, down the  
13 line we'll all be at that groundbreaking together.

14           Secondly, we are also-- he's also  
15 committed to creating a security cooperative that  
16 will take advantage of the spending that will be  
17 happening in the Peninsula. And this will again be  
18 part of a broader initiative on the Peninsula  
19 connected to creating a broad network of local  
20 cooperatives. And so, with that, we are really  
21 hopeful that this connection to the Astoria Houses  
22 Community could be a model for other communities that  
23 are having development with strong public housing  
24 neighborhoods.

25           HOWARD WEISS: [off mic]

2 DEBRA-ELLEN GLICKSTEIN: Oh, and just for  
3 clarification, the Security Cooperative would be a  
4 cooperative of security guards. That would be part  
5 of Astoria Cove. And so, with that, we are going to  
6 turn it over to a multi-media presentation.

7 MALE SPEAKER: What risk can we count  
8 [sic] when we're looking at here with this Astoria  
9 Cove Project? We're looking at number one, job  
10 creation. The construction jobs that will actually  
11 open up apprentice opportunities for young men with  
12 priority on those residents that live in Astoria  
13 Houses. The permanent jobs. The permanent jobs are  
14 going to be union jobs. They're going to pay a  
15 living wage so that people can support their  
16 families, and move up the economic ladder. When this  
17 project is developed, there'll be restaurants.  
18 There'll be a supermarket. There'll be drug stores.  
19 There'll be clothing stores. This developer has a  
20 heart for the neighborhood, wants to see the  
21 neighborhood grow together. With his ability to  
22 bring housing and then opportunity for affordable  
23 housing for people that want to move to the next  
24 level, and can move to the next level. So I applaud  
25 this developer, and I applaud this project. I

2 believe that the benefits of the community are going  
3 to be enormous, and they're going to have a  
4 tremendous impact on the economic and social status  
5 of the community at large.

6 FEMALE SPEAKER: When I moved here, the  
7 resources that we needed for a stable family was  
8 here. We lost our grocery store. We had a couple of  
9 drug stores at the time and shoemakers, butchers,  
10 everything that you could-- in walking distance.  
11 Today, those things are not here, but the people we  
12 still are walking approximately 15 to 20 blocks where  
13 there are necessities and staples.

14 FEMALE SPEAKER: Astoria Cove is a great  
15 project because it's about to build a new exciting  
16 waterfront and buildings, and great new opportunities  
17 for my kids, as well as me and my husband. I'm also  
18 excited about the Astoria Cove Project because stores  
19 will be built for new opportunities for all of the  
20 residents of Astoria Projects.

21 MALE SPEAKER: I'm also excited to know  
22 that there will be union jobs available within these  
23 new projects because I work in the city so I might be  
24 able to just transfer to a closer job directly to  
25 work here.

2 MALE SPEAKER: I believe in the Astoria  
3 Cove Project because it's going to bring cooperative  
4 businesses.

5 FEMALE SPEAKER: We are so excited about  
6 the idea that we're getting a new supermarket in the  
7 Astoria Cove area.

8 FEMALE SPEAKER: Not only will I be able  
9 to work in a supermarket, but I'll be able to own it.

10 FEMALE SPEAKER: It's opening up the  
11 waterfront for the Astoria residents, and the  
12 surrounding Long Island City area, and I'm excited  
13 about. And I'm sure a lot of other residents are.  
14 Thank you.

15 FEMALE SPEAKER: I feel developing this  
16 site will bring jobs, revenue, and motivation to the  
17 neighborhood.

18 MALE SPEAKER: It's going to enhance the  
19 social fabric of the area. It's going to create  
20 additional revenue [sic] of the area. The  
21 transportation system it's going to be upgraded as a  
22 necessity of this development. And now to be able to  
23 go through to Astoria parks of that area it's going  
24 to be the most beautiful thing.



2 MALE SPEAKER: Anyone who's seen that  
3 property it's a no-brainer the end result. It's  
4 going to bring an infusion of people into that area  
5 who were simply not there.

6 FEMALE SPEAKER: I beg you to approve the  
7 project. The sooner we get this thing going, the  
8 better for all especially the youth of the area.

9 FEMALE SPEAKER: With the development  
10 that's going on, to me I believe that it can be a  
11 plus for the stability of the people who are here,  
12 especially the young families to raise their  
13 children.

14 FEMALE SPEAKER: We can be an example.

15 [Pause]

16 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay. Thank you. I  
17 guess all those people who were testifying, luckily  
18 they were all under two minutes. So it's okay. I  
19 don't know, Mr. Mavroudis, did you want to speak  
20 again or we can get onto the panel. Okay. Ready?

21 JOHN MAVROUDIS: We can move onto the  
22 panel.

23 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay, great. So,  
24 we've been joined by Council Member Elizabeth Crowley  
25 as well. I think I mentioned Council Member-- I did

2 mention Council Member Gentile is here as well. So  
3 we're going to move onto questions. I'm going to ask  
4 Council Member Constantinides, who represents Astoria  
5 Cove, to ask the first question. You guys have got  
6 to stick around. We've got questions for you.  
7 You're not getting off that easy. Council Member  
8 Constantinides.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Thank  
10 you. Thank you, Chair Weprin, Mr. Chairman. One of  
11 the concerns that have been raised throughout this  
12 project in addition to other issues we've talked  
13 about is the amount of density being added here. You  
14 reviewed for us the impacts that were identified in  
15 the EIS.

16 HOWARD WEISS: [off mic] Sir, could you  
17 repeat the for me?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: All  
19 right, gentlemen. One of the concerns that has been  
20 raised throughout the process in addition to what  
21 things we have talked about is density that's being  
22 added. Can you review the impacts identified by the  
23 EIS?

24 HOWARD WEISS: Yes, the impacts were  
25 reviewed across the board with respect to all of the

2 traditional areas of review under SECRA, including  
3 social fabric, including open space, air quality,  
4 transportation. And there were certain areas as  
5 disclosed in the Final Impact Statement, the  
6 Environmental Impact Statement where there would be  
7 impacts, and we provided mitigation. So that the  
8 various--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES:

10 [interposing] So what sort of--

11 HOWARD WEISS: --impacts are mitigated.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: So what  
13 sort of mitigations are proposed for the significant  
14 adverse impacts?

15 HOWARD WEISS: I'll call up Nobel [sp?]  
16 Greenberg with Philip Habib, and they could run  
17 through the FEIS, and we can run through every impact  
18 and all of the mitigation, if that's what the Council  
19 Member would like us to do this morning.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Some of  
21 the major ones, yes.

22 HOWARD WEISS: Okay.

23 [Pause]

24 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Just one second.

25 Council Member Williams has joined us, and he just

2 wants to vote on the cafe that we passed before.  
3 Council Member.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Uh-huh.

5 CLERK: Council Member Williams, LU 122.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: I vote aye.

7 CLERK: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you. Were you  
9 in the middle of answering that question?

10 PHILIP HABIB: Yes.

11 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay. Make sure to  
12 state your name.

13 PHILIP HABIB: All right. Good morning.  
14 My name is Philip Habib from Habib & Associates, the  
15 firm which is responsible for preparing EIS. So  
16 there are fairly substantial documents, and so our  
17 summary is probably best thing to read.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES:  
19 [interposing] The summary is best on the significant  
20 adverse Impact Study.

21 PHILIP HABIB: The project is  
22 predominantly residential, and so the impacts  
23 associated with the project are predominantly  
24 residential-oriented. The school, as an example, is  
25 identified as a potential impact, and the new school

1 is incorporated into the project as a consequence of  
2 that analysis. Open spaces, also a typical  
3 residential-oriented impact was identified in the  
4 planning process, and the project also then includes  
5 approximately two acres of new public open space. So  
6 many of-- At least in those two areas of the  
7 potential impact are actually incorporated into the  
8 project as part of the planning process.

10 One of the impacts that you mentioned was  
11 transportation. I think that has come up, and often  
12 those kinds of impacts are only partially under the  
13 jurisdiction of the applicant. So the applicant's  
14 project actually includes a new street systems that  
15 diffuses both pedestrian and traffic circulation in  
16 the immediate vicinity of the site. The applicant  
17 also in order to compensate for the assistance to the  
18 subway system has committed to implementing shuttle  
19 service to two stations both on the F-Line and Q.  
20 And so, those impacts are also partially affected by  
21 the project.

22 The project does have remaining  
23 significant impacts on the traffic system. And that  
24 has been an ongoing discussion with the Department of  
25 Transportation leading a requirement by the applicant

2 to actually conduct phase management studies as the  
3 project gets built. Often it's very hard to predict  
4 10, 15 years into the future, and many of the  
5 projects that are being implemented Domino Sugar and  
6 others, actually require the applicant to look at  
7 this again after the first couple of buildings are  
8 built. And then to address impacts as they evolve.

9 In the EIS there are project impacts that  
10 are solved by new traffic signals, parking regulation  
11 changes and so forth. However, the street system is  
12 dynamic. In this particular EIS all of the impacts  
13 consider that Hallet's Cove is already implemented as  
14 a base. And so, in some cases it might be considered  
15 the conservative, but that is typically how EIS's  
16 are done. So that is one of the reasons why the DOT  
17 and others actually like you to look at the project  
18 as it's being implemented. And that is also part of  
19 the project's mitigation requirements. So those are  
20 the big areas involved.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: And do  
22 you feel that the transportation impacts are  
23 sufficiently dealt with by just these shuttle buses?

24 PHILIP HABIB: Actually, there are two  
25 issues that came up that I think maybe I did not

1 mention. One was that a project of this scale really  
2 needs to accommodate all of its parking on site  
3 because it's fairly big. And so, that was one of the  
4 main elements. I think Jay indicated that it's  
5 almost 1,000 parking spaces or 900ish are going to be  
6 provided on site. So that addresses one of the  
7 elements. The other one that I think you brought up  
8 maybe, and that has been brought up, is an alternate  
9 mode of transportation by a ferry. That has proved  
10 to be a very successful East River transportation  
11 element along the East River Ferry that has happened.

12  
13           And it is also part of a long-term plan  
14 to extend that East River Ferry up the East River to  
15 a northern terminal in Astoria. And the applicant,  
16 therefore, has incorporated in the physical sense the  
17 plan for that ferry. Because it is part of a network  
18 or a shuttle, if you will, it's not the applicant's  
19 ferry. And so, the applicant can and has committed  
20 to putting that ferry system at the foot of 26th  
21 Avenue. No, I'm sorry. At 9th Street as part of the  
22 plan. And just for your information, as part of  
23 planning as well, we anticipate that is implemented,  
24 the shuttle, that would take people to the subway  
25 would likely also pick up other individuals headed

2 back to the project's ferry system. So the shuttle  
3 while it delivers users to subway stations, also  
4 because it comes back, it also works as an access  
5 system to the ferry. And so, both elements would  
6 also help. The parking and the ferry also contribute  
7 significantly to reducing the impact of these  
8 projects.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: And what  
10 sorts of conversations have you had with EDC and the  
11 Administration regarding that ferry site?

12 HOWARD WEISS: Mr. Council Member, going  
13 back two years, we met initially with EDC and  
14 advocated to include a taxi location, a ferry taxi  
15 location at this site. As you know, in the latter  
16 part of last year EDC came forth with an updated  
17 report on the experimental ferry service. In fact,  
18 included this site as part of the future. We have  
19 not had recent conversations because at this point  
20 the City itself has with the developer of Hallet's  
21 Cove funded a study going forward to conclusively  
22 determine whether a ferry that would be located at  
23 Hallet's Point. We publicly avowed that we will work  
24 with the administration, with you, Mr. Council



2 Member, and whoever else has a strong interest in  
3 locating a ferry terminal at this project site.

4 PHILIP HABIB: One other point to be  
5 added. The adjacent development at Hallet's Point it  
6 was recently in the press that it was purchased by  
7 the Durst Organization. It's well known that the  
8 Durst Organization runs one of the major ferry  
9 services in New York, and they have attended each of  
10 the Community Board meetings and spoke in favor of  
11 ferry service. So one of the actual ferry operators  
12 is actually doing the development immediately next  
13 door and is very quid pro quo.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: I  
15 appreciate that. I mean look I'm a life-long  
16 resident of Astoria, and on my way here this morning  
17 on Astoria Boulevard this was a little bit of a  
18 hiccup on the N-Line, and I didn't have a shot at a  
19 seat. I know the people at Broadway had no chance  
20 whatsoever. And I can see that the addition of 3,800  
21 units requires us to make some sort of major  
22 transportation upgrades. There just isn't enough?  
23 There aren't enough trains, and there certainly  
24 aren't enough buses, even if we ran them every five  
25 minutes, which I don't think the MTA is committed to

2 do. Without some sort of meaningful transportation,  
3 there is no way somebody can build a 21st Century  
4 development without having a way to move people  
5 around the city. So I'm hoping we can have some sort  
6 of commitment from you to help us with that when the  
7 time does arise.

8 PHILIP HABIB: Absolutely, Mr. Council  
9 Member, and we look forward to working with you to  
10 advocate for ferry service at this site and to see it  
11 implemented.

12 HOWARD WEISS: Absolutely, Mr. Council  
13 Member and we look forward to working with you to  
14 advocate for ferry service at this site, and to see  
15 it implemented.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Now, let  
17 me kind of switch gears to affordability at the  
18 moment. Sort of walk me through phase by phase how  
19 many affordable units will be created in phase 1,  
20 phase 2, phase 3, and phase 4.

21 HOWARD WEISS: It's sort of so--

22 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: [interposing] Just  
23 make sure to say your name when you speak.

24 HOWARD WEISS: Pardon?

2 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Just repeat your  
3 name when you do take the mic.

4 HOWARD WEISS: That's correct. Howard  
5 Weiss. Twenty percent of the residential  
6 developments in each phase will be affordable units.  
7 So there's a total of 345 affordable units in the  
8 project right now. And within each phase the number  
9 of units that are developed 20% of those. So we're  
10 not loading the affordable units in any particular  
11 phase, but we're spreading it across the entire  
12 project. And with each phase, 20% will be developed.  
13 So I understand the first phase will have 28 units,  
14 which is 20% of the total residential floor being  
15 developed. The next phase 97 units. The next phase  
16 211 units, which then it totals. And then finally we  
17 reach the 345 units with the last phase. So, it's  
18 cumulative as we move through the phasing, but each  
19 phase is 20%.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: You keep  
21 talking about this 20% as it's a certainty. But  
22 doesn't the zoning text provides an option for you to  
23 sort of take that down to 10% of the 80 and then  
24 build another 20% at 165, which is really beyond the  
25 scope of what residents in Astoria can pay. And you

2 keep saying that we're not going to avail ourselves  
3 of that provision, but cross your heart and hope to  
4 die is not good enough for me. I think a little bit  
5 more than that. Would you have any objections to  
6 just taking that out of the zoning text?

7           HOWARD WEISS: I think the zoning text as  
8 written based upon what are the economics of  
9 developing affordable housing without public subsidy  
10 require precisely what's in there. And if you go  
11 into reach for a higher band, and this developer  
12 isn't doing it, but you're right theoretically the  
13 developer could. It increases the degree of  
14 affordable housing from 20% to 25%. And it would be  
15 problematic if you remove that because unless--

16           COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES:  
17 [interposing] I'm not talking about the 25%. I'm  
18 talking about the 30% that allows you to go 10% at 80  
19 and then another 20% at 175. So if you're talking  
20 about the moderate, the middle, you're sort of not  
21 addressing the larger question here. That leaves  
22 only 10% at 80 and then 20% at 165, 175.

23           HOWARD WEISS: If there is a higher band  
24 reached, but then that is also without public  
25 subsidies. So the dialogue would be that if, in

1 fact, we wanted to reach a greater percentage of  
2 affordable housing, then one would have to look not  
3 only at the bands, but also whether or not the  
4 project then produces affordable housing. And it's  
5 certainly a conversation, Mr. Council Member, that we  
6 wanted to have with you. So at the end of the day,  
7 we hope that you and your colleagues in the Council  
8 can be satisfied that the program as proposed for  
9 this project works for the neighborhood. And also,  
10 that it's going to be economically viable.

12 So right now, Astoria Cove without public  
13 subsidy at 20%, at 80% AMI absolutely works. We  
14 certainly are open, and we've actually-- Because we  
15 know your concern, we've actually been looking at  
16 other formulas that we are interested to discuss with  
17 you and your colleagues at the Council. And come up  
18 with a formula that continues to keep this project  
19 economically viable, but may then change the  
20 configuration. Not only in terms of percentage and  
21 bands, but the necessity for public subsidy.

22 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Yeah, and I would just  
23 like to add that our proposal to HPD has always been  
24 all of the affordable units are at 80% of AMI.  
25 There's no deviation from the 80% number. If our

2 Affordable Housing Plan was approved today, every  
3 single unit would be at 80% of AMI.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Thank  
5 you, Mr. Mavroudis. I mean, I just-- I mean I hear  
6 what you're telling me, Mr. Mavroudis. I understand  
7 that, but I still have this zoning text that provides  
8 that opportunity, that option to go to 30 and 20% of  
9 it being way above market for the community. I still  
10 have some reservations about that. And I hear you,  
11 and we're going to continue to talk.

12 HOWARD WEISS: And that's fair. We  
13 respect that, Mr. Council Member, and we will have--

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES:  
15 [interposing] Mr. Weiss

16 HOWARD WEISS: --that dialogue with you.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: And I  
18 think, you know, again we talked about the Astoria  
19 House and how we're going to integrate the  
20 surrounding community into this development. The  
21 average income there is somewhere around less than  
22 \$30,000 a year, but right now the AMIs are closer to  
23 80, which would really sort of lock them out. If  
24 they were to win the lottery, they wouldn't be able  
25 to afford the rents. If we talk about preference in

2 bringing the Astoria Houses and the surrounding  
3 community into this development, how do we sort of  
4 meet that new zoning text?

5 HOWARD WEISS: We--

6 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: [interposing]

7 Whichever one of you talks, say your name.

8 HOWARD WEISS: I'm sorry. Howard Weiss.  
9 We have taken a look based upon available data at the  
10 income levels at Astoria Houses. And what we  
11 understand is that there are at least 90 households  
12 earning \$50,000 to \$74,000; 41 households earning  
13 about \$75,000. So that these households totaling 131  
14 households presently at Astoria Houses would  
15 certainly qualify for the low-income band at 80% AMI.  
16 And if we create that upward mobility for the  
17 residents in Astoria Houses to come into the  
18 affordable units in this development at 80% AMI, it  
19 then opens up the opportunity in Astoria Houses for  
20 more persons at perhaps low income to be able to come  
21 into Astoria Houses. And it really does create an  
22 interesting fabric and fiber for this community in  
23 terms of affordability moving from public housing to  
24 privately developed housing, and then availing itself  
25 of the Affordable Housing Program. So we're

2 extremely sensitive to the concern that you expressed  
3 regarding that mobility, and the opportunity. And  
4 we've given a lot of thought about that, and that's  
5 definitely in the mix. And I think that's one of the  
6 reasons why you heard today, and you'll hear further,  
7 that this project has the support and the endorsement  
8 of the Astoria Houses Tenant Association and its  
9 President. Because there's been a lot of focus with  
10 respect to this project on a very significant  
11 neighbor, which is Astoria Houses.

12 [Pause]

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Sort of  
14 lastly so talk to me a little bit about the school.  
15 Talk to me about the process that SCA will have the  
16 option processes on the work. What's going to happen  
17 if it's not optioned? What is your intention with  
18 the site if there isn't an option? Of course, we  
19 hope that there is, but if not?

20 HOWARD WEISS: We have a letter of intent  
21 with the School Construction Authority. It's  
22 something that was drafted and redrafted and  
23 redrafted again based upon concerns that were  
24 expressed by City Planning concerns that we heard  
25 from you, Council Member, and from others in the



2 community. So, the School Construction Authority  
3 will have the opportunity when we're about to enter  
4 into phase 1 of the development to consider  
5 developing the school at that point in time. If they  
6 elect not to do so, we will then develop an interim  
7 park for the use of the entire community. And then  
8 I'm going to let John go into the details as to how  
9 he envisions that working as developer.

10 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Yeah, so this is John  
11 Mavroudis again. And with the help of the Astoria  
12 Houses Resident's Association, which sponsored a  
13 survey to residents and other local community  
14 stakeholders asking what would be a good interim use  
15 for that school? We've gathered data from them.  
16 Currently, you know, it's still being tabulated  
17 because they're still out there, the surveys. But  
18 they have suggested the need for something related to  
19 seniors and something related to the youth. So what  
20 we envision at this point is something to the effect  
21 of a senior center that could basically improve upon  
22 the programs that are currently not being available  
23 to the seniors at this point. And then a combination  
24 of some outdoor recreation or farming activities. So

2 it's still being looked at, but we're gathering the  
3 information that we've received so far.

4           HOWARD WEISS: But in terms of-- Howard  
5 Weiss again, but in terms of the development of the  
6 school, what John described is the interim use. When  
7 we reach the final phase, if the SCA elects at that  
8 time not to develop the school, and it's within their  
9 control, what we will then need to do is return to  
10 City Planning and the City Council. And the future  
11 of that site will have to go through ULURP. It could  
12 be a community facility. It could be housing,  
13 perhaps senior housing. It could be whatever both  
14 you, Mr. Council Member, and the community envisions  
15 would be appropriate at that site. But we would have  
16 to go through a public review process again if the  
17 school is not developed by the School Construction  
18 Authority.

19           COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Mr.  
20 Chairman, at this time, I'm going to allow some of my  
21 other colleagues to ask questions while we're all  
22 her, and I'll come back as soon as possible.

23           CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Council  
24 Member. Just for the record, we have a number of  
25 people who have questions, Council Members. This is

2 still going to take some time, but these are  
3 important questions that people want to know the  
4 answers to. I would like to call on Council Member  
5 Reynoso, and then that's going to be followed by  
6 Public Advocate Tish James.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: Good morning,  
8 fellows. I just want to say you-- I'm a little  
9 confused over how you guys are making statements. If  
10 anyone was new to this whole process and was  
11 listening to you speak, they would think that you  
12 guys are doing something that's out of the ordinary.  
13 When 80/20, which is what you're proposing to do is  
14 something that comes from the old book of Bloomberg.  
15 It is something that we've thought has failed the  
16 communities especially communities of color or low-  
17 income communities throughout the City of New York.  
18 It hasn't worked. Then we have other projects that  
19 are as large comparable to yours. Let's say North  
20 Brooklyn. Like Domino who proposed to give 27% of  
21 the entire square footage of the project, not just  
22 the residential square footage for affordable housing  
23 without subsidy. So, what you're doing is not  
24 unprecedented in any way, shape, or form. I want to  
25 be very clear that you guys in providing us with

2 answers to bare minimum. And it's concerning to me  
3 that I don't feel that you guys feel that way, or  
4 that you guys think that way. That you think you're  
5 coming to us with the best project in the world. So  
6 I just want to be mindful. I want you to be mindful.  
7 80/20 without subsidies is a joke. That is not--  
8 that is the old standard. It is not the new  
9 standard. [applauses/cheers]

10 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Please. As I  
11 mentioned--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: How many--

13 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: See how upset they  
14 get. So again, we don't want to have that happen  
15 again. We don't want to have people asked to leave.  
16 So try to keep the claps. You can do that, yeah.  
17 You can use the jazz hands if you want. Thank you.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: Square footage.  
19 How much square footage are you going to put in for  
20 affordable housing?

21 HOWARD WEISS: Twenty percent of the  
22 residential floor are of the project.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: So you're saying  
24 of the residential floor area, which is 329,536

2 square feet. So that's looking at about 1,000 or 955  
3 square feet per unit and on average--

4 HOWARD WEISS: [interposing] Correct.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: --is what you're  
6 proposing. Sorry, I'm just trying to get my math  
7 together. So, if you had the entire proposed total  
8 floor area, which is 1.7 million, it would be 352,000  
9 square feet at 20% AMI of the total floor area, not  
10 just the residential floor area. So those are two  
11 things to consider, and then when we're looking at  
12 AMI, do you know the average AMI for an Astoria  
13 resident?

14 HOWARD WEISS: I believe that based upon  
15 2012 data, which was within a half mile radius of the  
16 study area, it's \$47,000.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: Do you know what  
18 \$47,000 is according to AMI? AMI, not \$47,000, the  
19 percentage of AMI. You guys are proposing 80% AMI.  
20 I want to know what \$47,000, which is-- which sounds  
21 funny, by the way. You said a one-mile radius giving  
22 that Astoria Houses--

23 HOWARD WEISS: [interposing] Definitely.

24

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: Astoria Houses  
3 is half a block away, and you're average AMI is  
4 \$47,000. That doesn't make--

5 HOWARD WEISS: [interposing] We don't  
6 have the data as to the AMI in the Astoria Houses.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: All right, so  
8 you guys said that you've been working with the  
9 community for four years, working very closely with  
10 the entire community for four years, and you can't  
11 tell me how much Astoria Houses-- Astoria residents  
12 make in a year? That's not four years of work.  
13 What's the AMI?

14 [audience discussions]

15 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Keep it quiet, and  
16 the record will note a lot of hands are in the air.  
17 Okay.

18 HOWARD WEISS: The average. Okay, the  
19 average income--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: [interposing]  
21 Yes.

22 HOWARD WEISS: --in Astoria Houses would  
23 average anywhere--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: [interposing] No,  
25 in Astoria.

2 HOWARD WEISS: In Astoria Houses.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: Astoria. Not  
4 houses. Astoria, Queens. Because you guys have a  
5 CB1. You guys have a CB preference that you're going  
6 to have to give to Astoria residents. So you should  
7 know what they make so that you can try to conform  
8 the rent to them.

9 HOWARD WEISS: The Queens median income  
10 is \$52,000 and I have it at \$48,000. [sic]

11 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: That's Queens.  
12 I'm talking about Astoria. What's the Community  
13 Board, Council Member Constantinides?

14 HOWARD WEISS: Community Board 1.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: Community Board  
16 1 AMI is how much?

17 HOWARD WEISS: We don't have that number  
18 right now.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: And that's not  
20 good. I just want to be very clear that if you guys  
21 have been working for four years, you should know at  
22 least that the community you're coming into you  
23 should know how much they're getting paid. Because  
24 it's not \$57,000 or \$52,000 or \$47,000. And then you  
25 should abide by putting the AMI to reflect the

2 average median income of Astoria not of Queens and  
3 not of 80%. Remember, bare minimum. We don't want  
4 that any more. We don't want that any more. We  
5 don't accept that. That's a different-- We have a  
6 different standard now.

7           You guys said that there's an opportunity  
8 here. Did you get HPD to commit to having a  
9 preference outside of CB to include a more targeted  
10 preference to Astoria Houses?

11           HOWARD WEISS: We've met with HPD. We've  
12 made the request. They said they're looking at it.  
13 And so, we're working with them to try and-- As we  
14 said, that's something that we're striving to  
15 implement. And so, we have been meeting with HPD,  
16 and asked them to consider whether we can do that.

17           COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: That would be  
18 the only thing that you guys are doing here that  
19 would be unprecedented, would be to allow for a  
20 double preference, a dual preference here with a  
21 specific one to Astoria Houses. I think it is the  
22 only thing that is of significance so far. Also--

23           [Pause]

24           COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: Do you know the  
25 breakdown of units that you're going to be having at



2 this site as well? Do you know how many three-  
3 bedrooms, two-bedrooms, one-bedrooms? Do you know  
4 the average family size of an Astoria resident?  
5 Family size?

6 HOWARD WEISS: We don't have the unit  
7 breakdown right now?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: What about the  
9 average family size of an Astoria resident or of an  
10 Astoria family?

11 [Pause]

12 HOWARD WEISS: [off mic]

13 JAY VALGORA: Yes, this is Jay Valgora,  
14 the Architect. When one master plans a development,  
15 especially for this size, one never plans the unit  
16 mix breakdown at this stage. It's never a part of  
17 the planning process. So it's not typical to do  
18 that. So it's not that we don't have the  
19 information. One doesn't do it during the master  
20 planning stage.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: I understand  
22 that, but what is the average family size of the  
23 Astoria planning.

24

25

2           HOWARD WEISS: Okay, so in Astoria single  
3 seniors, 13.3%; families with two plus seniors only,  
4 1.3%.

5           COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: Whoa, what are  
6 you referencing? I don't understand what you're  
7 saying.

8           COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: I'm referencing  
9 the demographics for Astoria for household size?

10           HOWARD WEISS: So again, seniors only,  
11 13.3%; two or more seniors in a single household,  
12 1.6%; singles, non-senior, 10.8%; couples no  
13 children, .8%; two parents and a child or children  
14 under 18, 6.6%; two parents with a child over 18,  
15 14.3%; a single parent with a child or children under  
16 18, 25.1%; single parent with a child or children  
17 over 18, 19.7%. And then there's some numbers for  
18 the grandparents current [sic] to the household.

19           COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: We have over 50%  
20 of this community is in need of either two or three-  
21 bedroom apartments in Astoria. So I just want you  
22 guys to be mindful during or after the master  
23 planning that you look at apartment size. And the  
24 only concern that I have regarding that, and I know  
25 this is a master plan, and you guys don't calculate

2 exactly what unit breakdown is. But when you have  
3 345 units out of a 1,723-unit building, you're not  
4 filling a need in our community. There's a need for  
5 affordable housing in Astoria. Not for market rate  
6 housing in Astoria. So 80/20 is no good. Right now  
7 with this plan, I hope you are talking to Costa  
8 Constantinides, but you guys are way off. There is  
9 no chance that it's going to move through, or that  
10 I'm going to vote this through anywhere near where  
11 you have it right now. You guys are very far off,  
12 very, very far off. And I'm done with my questions.

13 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Council  
14 Member Reynoso. I'd like to call on Public Advocate  
15 Tish James, who has been leading-- I understand  
16 leading some of the hand waving from behind.

17 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: Well, Mr.  
18 Chairman, the wave was named after me.

19 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: [laughs] Okay.

20 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: Let me just say  
21 that I'm very familiar with Alma I've worked with  
22 Alma in my district in the past. But now as a  
23 citywide elected official, the question here today.  
24 Astoria Cove has become the latest flashpoint in a  
25 broader discussion regarding the crisis in affordable

1 housing New York City. And by increasing the value  
2 of your property, in effect extending a public  
3 benefit, the question is, is 20% enough? And within  
4 that 20%, are you really focusing? Is your AMI  
5 targeted toward residents who need it most, primarily  
6 the 3,000 residents who reside at Astoria Public  
7 Housing. You indicated in your comments that the AMI  
8 only targets around 130, which is clearly  
9 insufficient.  
10

11           The other question is it really okay to  
12 build a New York City non-union labor at a time when  
13 there's a growing income inequality? And we know  
14 that union labor really provides for middle-class  
15 families. And the other larger question is can we  
16 make sure that men and women who work on these sites  
17 are paid decent wages and benefits. And more  
18 importantly, can they afford to live there. And I  
19 particularly want to focus on the residents of  
20 Astoria Housing because I've seen this playbook  
21 before. I saw this playbook at Atlantic Yards where  
22 they had wonderful clergy and residents of public  
23 housing come out and support the project. They had  
24 rallies in support of the project, and you know what  
25 happened.

1           As of today, all we have is an arena. No  
2 one has a job. There's no affordable housing at that  
3 project, at that development. Despite all of the  
4 clergy and residents of public housing saying how  
5 great Atlantic Yards was and is or was. We're not  
6 saying how great it is now. And, in regards to the  
7 Brooklyn situation, at the Brooklyn Jewish Hospital  
8 Complex there are 700 units owned by this developer,  
9 and he has provided notice to the residents that  
10 they're about to destabilize. Which will have a  
11 destabilizing effect on the community.

12           So I know and I respect the local council  
13 member, and I will respect and defer to his wishes.  
14 But this project raises significant broader issues in  
15 the City of New York. Primarily, the lack-- the non-  
16 union labor, and two, the crisis in affordable  
17 housing, and how you're really targeting market rate  
18 housing. To say low income is really not accurate,  
19 and really doesn't reflect the incomes of the  
20 residents primarily in Astoria Public Housing, which  
21 I'm not-- Let me end by saying it totals 3,000  
22 residents who the vast majority of them work, and  
23 would love to be a part, and to be integrated in this  
24 wonderful project.  
25

2 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Say your name.

3 HOWARD WEISS: Madam Public Advocate, we  
4 certainly appreciate those concerns. They are  
5 concerns that, you know, echo concerns that have been  
6 expressed by Council Member Constantinides. We have  
7 an ongoing dialogue, and we hope to come to a point  
8 where there is a level of comfort among the council  
9 member and his colleagues and yourself. And also  
10 that involves a development that would be  
11 economically viable. So that, in fact, we will be  
12 able to go forward, and produce even more meaningful  
13 affordable housing, but in a way that everyone will  
14 feel comfortable with. And we certainly appreciate  
15 what you have articulated this morning.

16 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: And I appreciate  
17 the fact that you are looking at credit. It's an  
18 issue that my office is focusing on, credit  
19 eligibility in the City of New York. There have been  
20 barriers that have unfortunately prevented a  
21 significant number of moderate and working class  
22 people in the City of New York for working to apply  
23 for some of the units that are available now in the  
24 City of New York. So I applaud you for that. I also  
25 applaud the developer on the supermarket. There was

2 a supermarket that was built in Brooklyn around the  
3 corner from Brooklyn Jewish. I worked with the  
4 developer to hire local residents. I thank him for  
5 that. It is a wonderful success. But again, and I'm  
6 not trying to connect the two. I would love to have  
7 a conversation with you and the developer regarding  
8 Brooklyn Jewish Hospital, along with the Brooklyn  
9 Borough President and local assembly members who are  
10 here. And in respect to this particular project, I  
11 would urge you to really look at your AMI to perhaps  
12 expand the number of units. I would join with the  
13 Council Member in working with-- in contacting HPD,  
14 and negotiating additional resources. And last but  
15 not least, I believe union is middle-class, and I  
16 believe that this project should be union if we are  
17 really interested in focusing on addressing income  
18 and equality in the City of New York. And I thank  
19 you.

20 HOWARD WEISS: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you Council--  
22 Public Advocate Tish James. Excuse me. I'd like to  
23 now call on Council Member Elizabeth Crowley.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Thank you, Chair  
25 Weprin. Good morning. I'd like to ask the

2 developers how long have you been having a dialogue  
3 that you spoke about earlier with Council Member  
4 Constantinides, and the community? Because you  
5 answered the Public Advocate's questions about your  
6 plan of development in saying that you're going to  
7 have a continued dialogue. But we're considering  
8 seven measures before the Council today. So how long  
9 has your dialogue been going on?

10 HOWARD WEISS: With the Council Member  
11 from the day --

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: [interposing]  
13 And the community--

14 HOWARD WEISS: --he took office and--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: --before that.

16 I know that the Council Member just took office this  
17 year, but prior to that?

18 HOWARD WEISS: And with his predecessor  
19 before that, but, of course, the landscape has  
20 changed in terms of the focus on affordable housing,  
21 and from the beginning. And as we move through this  
22 process now before the Council, we're trying to bring  
23 it home in terms of him being comfortable with this  
24 project, and what it will provide for the community.



2 So it's an ongoing process. And similarly, with the-

3 -

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: [interposing] I  
5 was just asking for like a year, or two years, three  
6 years. I'm curious to how long the dialogue has been  
7 going on.

8 HOWARD WEISS: Oh, it's been going on for  
9 about a year or a year and a half.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Okay, and the  
11 video you played had a number of community residents  
12 praising the project. And one community leader  
13 stated that your project will provide union jobs.

14 HOWARD WEISS: We have been--

15 JOHN MAVROUDIS: [interposing] Yeah, this  
16 is John Mavroudis. We've already expressed our  
17 willingness to work with union trades, and with the  
18 service unions.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: By the time the  
20 Council considers these measures, it has been the  
21 usual case that developers already have an agreement  
22 in place, such as a project labor agreement. There  
23 are a number of unions here today that don't believe  
24 that this project will be built union. And there are  
25 unions that are also concerned about after the

2 project is built, you know, the different jobs that  
3 are servicing the building. That those jobs, too,  
4 will be union. There's no guarantee, and how could  
5 we consider the proposal today if you've had this  
6 dialogue for over a year, maybe a year and a half.  
7 You have community believing that there are going to  
8 be good jobs that their residents can have. But  
9 there is no guarantee. I mean it

10 HOWARD WEISS: [interposing] That's for  
11 the--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: --appears to me  
13 that you've been lying to the community. The  
14 community believes it will be a good union  
15 development, and that is not the case right now.

16 JOHN MAVROUDIS: So that is not the case  
17 not because of our intentions. We've actually sent  
18 over signed letters of intent, which include language  
19 that's set special priority goals for not only the  
20 local community, but Astoria Houses residents in  
21 particular. We have not had those agreements sent  
22 back to us counter signed.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: You know, when  
24 you put together the funding to support a development  
25 such as this, you should allow enough funding to pay

2 livable wages with people who are working on the job,  
3 coming from the training of apprentice programs.  
4 Skilled workers given the opportunity to people of  
5 Astoria to have a good paying job whereby possibly  
6 affording a unit in your building. But there is no  
7 guarantee of that. And, you know, the impression is  
8 the community has been lied to or fooled to a certain  
9 extent. Because they believe that good jobs are  
10 coming out of this project, and there is no plan yet  
11 in place. Now, you said--

12                   HOWARD WEISS: [interposing] Well, Madam  
13 Council Member, let me just clarify something and  
14 elaborate on something that John said. We have a  
15 letter of intent that was returned to the Trades  
16 Council, and the only-- And we have not received  
17 back that executed letter of intent. It's their form  
18 of letter of intent. The only thing that's different  
19 is we asked them to confirm that if we execute that  
20 letter with them that won't do anything adverse to  
21 prevent the approval of this project. But otherwise,  
22 there is a letter of intent with the Trades Council.  
23 We've also been in ongoing discussions with 32BJ,  
24 and, in fact, I had a meeting at 32BJ just last week.  
25 And moving to try to enter into a letter of intent

2 with them. So, I don't think it's fair to 2030  
3 Astoria to suggest that we've lied to anyone. We  
4 don't have the signed document, but we've been  
5 working very hard with both the Trades and with the  
6 Service Union to come to a resolve and have that  
7 written guarantee. And we hope to be able to satisfy  
8 you and everyone else who would like to see that in  
9 place before Council has to act.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Well, you're  
11 familiar with the wages that a union member makes.  
12 And so, I don't understand why--

13 HOWARD WEISS: [interposing] The issue  
14 is--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Are you asking  
16 for the unions to make a concession?

17 HOWARD WEISS: No.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: So what is  
19 holding up the agreement?

20 HOWARD WEISS: I think you need to speak  
21 with both the Trades Council and 32BJ to understand  
22 from them why we can't get letters of intent  
23 executed. I don't want to speak for them.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Earlier, when my  
25 colleague was asking about affordable housing,

2 Council Member Constantinides, you know, he was  
3 accurate in saying that the 20% that you're giving in  
4 your plan that you would like the Council to approve  
5 will help area median income folks. Ten percent of  
6 it will-- Ten percent of it you're asking for people  
7 who make much more than the average area median  
8 income. You stated that you're not getting any  
9 public benefits, or public subsidies, but your  
10 development will not pay taxes for a number of years.  
11 How many years do you plan on not paying taxes on the  
12 buildings that you're building?

13 HOWARD WEISS: Between 15 and 25.

14 [audience protest]

15 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet down, please.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: If that's not a  
17 public subsidy, I'm not sure what to call it. I know  
18 how much I pay on taxes on a small little unit that I  
19 have in Queens. Not to mention this property which  
20 will have direct views of the City of New York, which  
21 will be very expensive for people who do rent your  
22 market rate housing. And your market rate housing  
23 will drive up area rents. Whereby displacing people  
24 from Astoria. How many square footage of your plan  
25 will be set aside for the affordable units? Will

2 your affordable units be smaller than your market  
3 rate units, or will you give at least 20% of the  
4 overall square footage to affordable housing?

5 JOHN MAVROUDIS: John Mavroudis again.  
6 Twenty percent of the square footage of the project  
7 is affordable residences.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: [interposing]  
9 How many square feet is that?

10 JOHN MAVROUDIS: 350,000 some odd square  
11 feet.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Good.

13 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Every unit is evenly  
14 dispersed throughout the project. The apartments are  
15 going to be built to the same spec as the market rate  
16 units. Not only to--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: [interposing]  
18 For--

19 JOHN MAVROUDIS: --the same spec in terms  
20 of unit size, and finishes. Unit size specifically  
21 is important to understand that because the  
22 affordable units are being built within the buildings  
23 along with the market, they have to follow the same  
24 lines in construction. And respectfully, the tax  
25 abatement will help us carry the project moving

2 forward to offset the affordable housing. But it  
3 does not help us in terms of the financial structure  
4 of the construction of the project.

5 [Pause]

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: All right. In  
7 closing, I have no further questions. I hope that  
8 you can come to an agreement with the Council Member  
9 and with the Trades. I hope that you'll have more  
10 units available for affordable housing, and that your  
11 project will be built safely, and provide good jobs  
12 to our community residents. Thank you.

13 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Council  
15 Member Crowley. I do want to acknowledge for those  
16 who are watching at home or who are unaware that  
17 while we are having a hearing today, we expect to  
18 hear from everyone who wants to testify on this  
19 matter. We are not going to be voting today, and  
20 there will be a number of-- Some time to negotiate.  
21 What we hear today obviously is important to us, and  
22 what we hear today we want to talk to the developer  
23 about. And any discussions about an approval would  
24 have to incorporate a lot of the testimony we hear

2 today. So I would like to call on now Council Member  
3 Jumaane Williams from Brooklyn.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you very  
5 much, Mr. Chair. Thank you for your testimony.  
6 There's a rapper in Brooklyn names Troy Ave. He has  
7 a new song. He's very talented actually. I don't  
8 particularly like all of his songs, but he's  
9 talented. But the chorus of his new song for me kind  
10 of sums a lot of issues that we deal with. And the  
11 chorus just simply repeats: It's all about the  
12 money. It's all about the money.

13 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Give me a beat.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: And this-- I'm  
15 no good. I don't have a beat.

16 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Oh. [laughs]

17 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: To me, it  
18 points out some of the issues in the industry I love,  
19 which is hip-hop and other industry I love, which is  
20 housing. It seems to be too much and only about the  
21 money, which is something that concerns me, and has  
22 concerned me for far too long. I think social issues  
23 like people having housing should at least have some  
24 more weight than it does, and not make it just all  
25



2 about the money. So I have a few questions and some  
3 comments.

4 First, I was very shocked to hear about  
5 the 15-- I think you said the 25-- Hold on a  
6 second. The 15 to 25-year tax abatement that's going  
7 to occur. Do you consider that a public subsidy, or  
8 do you not consider that a public subsidy?

9 JOHN MAVROUDIS: I consider that a tax  
10 abatement.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Yeah, do you  
12 consider it public subsidy or not a public subsidy?

13 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Well, it's a public  
14 program. I don't consider it a subsidy for the  
15 development because it doesn't help subsidize the  
16 construction of the development.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Do you consider  
18 it as something being given to you by the City and  
19 taxpayers of New York City?

20 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Yes.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you. So,  
22 I don't think it's completely true that you're not  
23 getting any tax money from New York City particularly  
24 when you have a rent abatement for that long. And  
25 from what I've heard, and it's not completely your

2 fault, it's a lot of people's fault. What's being  
3 presented I think is atrocious, and I want to thank  
4 Council Member Constantinides or Costa for being the  
5 lead and pushing this forward. I think 20% has never  
6 been acceptable, and certainly 10% is not acceptable.  
7 And from my understanding the 10% is at 80% of AMI  
8 and for a family of four that is \$68,700. There are  
9 a lot of families in Queens and in New York City who  
10 do not make \$68,700. So I always like to see things  
11 pushed down even further, 60%, 40% of AMI. So we can  
12 grab some more people. So your cap on affordability  
13 is 80% and that is only 10%. And then, you have  
14 another 10% that I understand can jump to 175% based  
15 on something that's written in the language. Is that  
16 correct?

17 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Our current plan that is  
18 submitted to HPD is all 20% or capped at 80% of AMI.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: But my  
20 understand there is something in writing that says  
21 for 10% of that 20% you have the option of going  
22 higher. Is that correct?

23 JOHN MAVROUDIS: The Zoning Text  
24 Resolution allows for a varying degree of AMI levels.  
25 So if we have a certain percentage lower, we can then

2 split up the difference and go higher on a certain  
3 other percentage of the AMI.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay.

5 JOHN MAVROUDIS: And it also increases  
6 the total percentage of affordable housing.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Just explain  
8 that again one more time.

9 JOHN MAVROUDIS: So if proposal were to  
10 include a different level, different levels of AMI  
11 ranging from the low going up to mid/mod, then it  
12 would create for more than 20% of affordable housing  
13 floor are in the project.

14 HOWARD WEISS: If I could-- Howard  
15 Weiss. By example, Mr. Council Member?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Sure.

17 HOWARD WEISS: So, if we were to-- We  
18 start out with 20% at the low income band at 80% AMI.  
19 If we want to reach to include a higher band of  
20 affordability, the way the Zoning Text is written, we  
21 would always have to have at least 10%. But if we  
22 were then to reach for the moderate band of  
23 affordability--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Let me-- I  
3 just want to walk it through. So right now, you have  
4 20% affordable?

5 HOWARD WEISS: Right.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: At 80% of AMI?

7 HOWARD WEISS: That's correct.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: And that is 345  
9 units?

10 HOWARD WEISS: That's correct.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Of 1,723 units.

12 HOWARD WEISS: Yes.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Just so we  
14 know, I think that's unacceptable, but that's what's  
15 here now. Now, let's continue.

16 HOWARD WEISS: So under the current text,  
17 which is not our proposal, but theoretically it would  
18 be possible. If we wanted to reach a higher band of  
19 affordability to bring persons with higher AMIs to  
20 the project. Let's say for the moderate band.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: When you say,  
22 are you talking about 60% of AMI or--

23 HOWARD WEISS: [interposing] No.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: --or 100% of  
25 AMI?

2 HOWARD WEISS: No, 120% AMI.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: So if you want  
4 to go up to 120% of AMI-

5 HOWARD WEISS: Right, we'd still have to  
6 provide at least 10% at the 80% of AMI, and then we'd  
7 have to provide another 15% at the moderate band at  
8 120% AMI. So it would increase the percentage of  
9 affordable housing in total--

10 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: [interposing]  
11 Wait. Stop. 120% is not affordable housing. Let's  
12 just be clear about it. So we keep using these  
13 terminologies for things that are not affordable  
14 housing in my eyes as the Housing Chair, and many of  
15 the people who are sitting here. So let's just be  
16 clear about that.

17 HOWARD WEISS: And that's not our  
18 proposal, and I understand the point you're making,  
19 but I'm simply explaining what the Zoning Text  
20 provides, and this is the way it's always worked.  
21 It's not something that we're inventing for the  
22 project in terms of how you define the different  
23 bands of affordability. But, in fact, the affordable  
24 housing in the larger scheme of things looks at low  
25 income, very low income, moderate, and middle, which

2 then takes in different AMIs. But I understand your  
3 point--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: [interposing]  
5 Yeah.

6 HOWARD WEISS: --about feeling that it  
7 needed to be at 80% to lower. But in terms of the  
8 Affordable Housing Program, it does recognize higher  
9 bands as still being affordable housing.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: So 130%. I  
11 know you're saying 120%. I don't have that number.  
12 130% at a family of four is \$111,670. I personally  
13 believe-- I try to use the words "income targeted"  
14 so that we can get exactly to what I'm trying to get  
15 at. And I believe there needs to be income targeted  
16 housing. I believe that people who make \$111,000  
17 should also have housing, and they may also need  
18 subsidies because the more years that pass, the more  
19 that this includes people who are middle-class. And  
20 I want to make sure they have funding as well. But  
21 the problem is we also keep forgetting about the  
22 people who are much lower, 60, 50, 40% of AMI. I do  
23 not think that the way we've been doing it has been  
24 working. I refuse to accept that metric system that  
25 we've been using to continue. I'm very happy that my

2 colleague has taken the lead in pushing that forward.

3 I don't believe that developers such as yourself who

4 actually do a lot of good things for the City. You

5 build things. You provide housing. You provide tax

6 revenue. However, I don't think you will do this on

7 your own without nudging from the Council. Without

8 nudging from New York City, and from some of the good

9 people who are sitting here today. And I believe we

10 have to continue to nudge, and continue to push.

11 Because the fact that you would come here and present

12 this as an affordable housing plan again shows me

13 that the rap lyric I pointed out to you is the only

14 basis we're using when we're building this housing

15 and we're building moving forward. I want to make

16 sure that we change that. So it's some about the

17 money, and also about making sure that the good

18 people in New York City has places to live. So that

19 they can provide the services that are needed for the

20 people who are actually getting most of the housing

21 that you're building. So I want to thank you very

22 much, Mr. Chair for that time. And I hope that

23 Council Member Constantinides and yourself will reach

24 a deal that his helpful for every income band in

25 Queens and in New York City.

2 HOWARD WEISS: Thank you, Council Member.

3 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you Council  
4 Member Williams. I would like to now call on Council  
5 Member Laurie Cumbo from Brooklyn.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Thank you, Chair  
7 for the opportunity to address some very important  
8 concerns and questions not only from me, but also  
9 from my district. I wanted to talk about how you go  
10 about the relationships with your contractors. And  
11 so, for me as an African-American and an African-  
12 American woman, it's also very important to know that  
13 the practices in which you engage with your  
14 contractors are fair and equitable. And I really  
15 wanted to bring light to your relationship with SSC  
16 High Rise, and want to understand how is it that you  
17 go about creating the relationships with those that  
18 you contract out with? Because in this case with the  
19 Burnham [sp?] project, it was noted that there were  
20 some serious and egregious issues in terms of how  
21 people were paid based off of their race.

22 With many African-Americans and Latinos  
23 being paid unfairly and inequitable to their White  
24 counterparts. We want to understand how you create  
25 the dynamics of how you contract with individuals?



2 Who you're going to be working with? And how are you  
3 going to ensure with this project that those same  
4 racial and discriminatory practices are not going to  
5 be put forward in this next project? Because as an  
6 African-American and as a woman, I find that this  
7 proactive in 2014, 2013-2014 raises serious concerns  
8 for me. And I want to know what your thoughts were  
9 around that issue, and moving forward how you're  
10 going to address it with this project?

11 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Thank you. No, you  
12 bring up a very good point, and they are also as a  
13 concern to me. We hired a general contractor on that  
14 site who then subbed out a part of the job to that  
15 contractor you mentioned, SSC. We had no prior  
16 working relationship with them. We actually met them  
17 on that particular job. We were brought-- I guess  
18 the history of SSC was brought to our attention  
19 through the newspaper for the first time. Soon after  
20 that--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Through the  
22 newspapers?

23 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Yes. In terms of the--  
24 In terms of the previous allegations because we  
25 didn't hire them directly. They were hired by a

2 general contractor. So then we asked for a follow-up  
3 question. We looked into their background. We  
4 understand that they went through I guess trials and  
5 came to punishment and penalties that they paid. We  
6 did confirm that those practices are obviously  
7 absolutely no longer continuing and never have  
8 continued at our site. And the only practice we can  
9 maintain going forward is to make sure that not only  
10 do our contractors go through the same process and  
11 background checks. But that their subs, which is  
12 just like this case, go through the exact background  
13 passes. You know, we don't-- I agree with you. I  
14 think that's all deplorable and doesn't exist  
15 anywhere today.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: How would you  
17 ensures that that-- I'm not clear in terms of what  
18 would your process be moving forward to make sure  
19 that that doesn't happen? Is there going to be some  
20 additional oversight that you all are going to  
21 utilize? Will you be able to with a much larger  
22 process, or project effectively utilize and  
23 understand who all your general contractors are  
24 subcontracting with? Will there be any policies or  
25 procedures put in place to make sure that something

2 like this doesn't happen? And what were, most  
3 importantly, the ramifications of that subcontractor  
4 for that particular practice on that site? What came  
5 of that?

6 JOHN MAVROUDIS: So, the second question  
7 I'll answer first. I believe he paid hefty, hefty  
8 fines in the million dollar range, and it was I  
9 believe three or four years ago. Going forward, we  
10 actually have looked into policies based on what just  
11 happened. And our practice going forward is to  
12 establish a background check similar to the type you  
13 would do if you were trying to get any type of job,  
14 but on a company basis. Whereby they have to confirm  
15 and affirm, you know, like a-- at least a minimum of  
16 a ten-year history in terms of any types of  
17 violations relating to the construction industry or  
18 employment labor law. So going forward, that policy  
19 will remain in effect. And not necessarily just  
20 under this particular project, but company wide.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Well, I think that  
22 particularly in this audience and beyond there are a  
23 lot of subcontractors that have far more reputable  
24 ways in order to evaluate the quality of their work  
25 and their hiring practices. And a lot of that comes

2 from working with a lot of our labor unions that do  
3 have an equitable and fair policies. And have a  
4 strong track record that you could find out about  
5 more so than perhaps a newspaper, or some sort of  
6 listing in that way. So I would hope that in the  
7 future, you would look at some of the individuals and  
8 hard-working individuals throughout our community.

9           The next one I wanted to ask in terms of  
10 what is your thought process in terms of even why are  
11 you considering moving into creating affordable  
12 housing units, and the project that you're putting  
13 forth? Why even consider it?

14           JOHN MAVROUDIS: I'm sorry. I don't  
15 understand the question? Why would I consider  
16 building?

17           COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Why even put forth  
18 or even have a commitment to even introducing  
19 affordable housing units in the development that  
20 you're proposing in Astoria?

21           JOHN MAVROUDIS: That's a good question.  
22 Our project has evolved over time, and that's the  
23 current status on that. I mean I believe from the  
24 very beginning we did include some level of

2 affordable housing. It wasn't 20%. It was less than  
3 20%, and the project has evolved to 20%.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: But if not  
5 interested in taking subsidies, what would be your  
6 motivation for offering the affordable housing?

7 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Go ahead.

8 HOWARD WEISS: If I may, Council Member--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Please.

10 HOWARD WEISS: Howard Weiss. I'm Land  
11 Use Counsel on the project.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Hello, Mr. Weiss.

13 HOWARD WEISS: So very simply the City  
14 has another zoning policy. It has for quite a number  
15 of years now provided particularly with respect to  
16 waterfront where you want to effectuate a zoning  
17 change from manufacturing to residential, the  
18 Inclusionary Housing Program would have to be mapped  
19 to that site. And you would be provided for the  
20 opportunity with an increase in FAR with the  
21 provision of affordable housing. With respect to  
22 this project, something that I absolutely do believe  
23 is groundbreaking, is it's not going to be the  
24 developer's option. Now, with respect to Astoria  
25 Cover, we have an agreement with this Administration,

2 which was brought to fruition in terms of the City  
3 Planning Commission's approval that's now before you.  
4 That in order to develop residential on this  
5 waterfront site, the developer has to provide  
6 affordable housing.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: So it's only  
8 because you have to do it in order to have the zoning  
9 change is your only interest in wanting to provide  
10 the affordable component to this?

11 HOWARD WEISS: If you--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: [interposing] Or  
13 do you have any other interest?

14 HOWARD WEISS: If you asked for the  
15 origin of including affordable housing, it's because  
16 it was in the context of the zoning affordable  
17 housing was in the mix. The difference is that  
18 whereas prior developers simply sought to have the  
19 option to do it, we agreed with this Administration  
20 for it to be mandated. Which we think is going to  
21 set the stage for future inclusionary housing  
22 projects.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: So you would agree  
24 with the Mayor's plan or desire to want to create and  
25 sustain affordable housing within New York City?

2           HOWARD WEISS: This project is very much  
3 reflective of the Mayor's Ten-Year Plan not only in  
4 terms of making the affordable housing mandatory, but  
5 that the affordable housing that is provided  
6 presently with our proposal the 20% is without any  
7 public subsidy. I know it's been expressed. Some  
8 people have the perspective that when there's a tax  
9 benefit attached to a development, that in and of  
10 itself, is viewed as a public subsidy. But I think  
11 that in terms of both zoning and what has been the  
12 City Housing policy. And we talk about public  
13 subsidy when you read the Mayor's Ten-Year Housing  
14 Plan that what we're talking about is, in fact,  
15 beyond any tax abatement. Public resources being  
16 used to support the subsidized housing, and that is  
17 something that's going to happen with respect to this  
18 project.

19           COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: So ultimately, you  
20 have a desire to be a team player, and to implement  
21 the Mayor's plan to create and sustain affordable  
22 housing in New York City?

23           HOWARD WEISS: To implement--

24           COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: [interposing]  
25 Would that be yes or no?

2           HOWARD WEISS: No, it is I think the fair  
3 response is to implement the Mayor's plan in a way  
4 that would, in fact, be economically viable for the  
5 project. And I think what is before the Council now  
6 based upon what was approved by the City Planning  
7 Commission is something that's economically viable.  
8 Although we have said that we are developing some  
9 alternatives. And we are going to have ongoing  
10 conversations with Council Member Constantinides and  
11 others who are concerned that the shape and the form  
12 of the present Affordable Housing Program that we  
13 might be able to meet some concerns, and also still  
14 keep this project economically viable.

15           COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: The reason why I  
16 ask is because -- and I'm going to conclude my  
17 questions -- is that in an interest as you stated to  
18 want to uphold the Mayor's Affordable Housing Plan.  
19 In my district there are 700 units that will come  
20 offline, and be turned into market rate that Alma  
21 owns. And so, in that interest, what I'm seeing is  
22 that what you propose to do in Astoria is to create  
23 345 units out of 1,700 that would be offered. In my  
24 district simultaneously, there will be 700 units of  
25 affordable housing that will be coming down. So what



2 I'm seeing in this project is that in your interest  
3 to carry out the Mayor's plan, unfortunately what  
4 will be happening in Brooklyn will go against the  
5 very desire that you want to utilize in order to  
6 create affordable housing throughout New York City.

7           So I only raise that question in the  
8 matter of trust. And in negotiations unfortunately a  
9 large part of that is built around areas of trust.  
10 It's built around areas of being forthcoming. It's  
11 in many ways unfortunately that we have to take you  
12 at your word. So I'm trying to understand based off  
13 of my own experiences that are unrelated to this  
14 project, wanting to make sure that what you're  
15 staring here and what you're going to do moving  
16 forward is going to be fair and equitable. And that  
17 you are, in fact, going to live up to your word.  
18 Although even with the word that you put forward many  
19 of my colleagues are pleased with that word. But we  
20 just want to understand that in moving forward.

21           HOWARD WEISS: Madam Council Member, You  
22 know, I appreciate what you just said. I want to  
23 just say first, the Brooklyn site that you're talking  
24 about is not a site that's controlled, and it's not  
25 owned and operated by 2030 Astoria Developers. It is

2 owned by one of the partners in 2030. And certainly  
3 I can tell you that Alma would be very interested in  
4 speaking with you today to clarify exactly what  
5 happened with respect to that project and look at the  
6 future.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: And I appreciate  
8 that, and as stated before, this conversation could  
9 have been handled a long time ago. And so, it's very  
10 important that when a major developer and/or it's  
11 partners want to move 700 units of affordable housing  
12 into a community in that way, out of a community in  
13 that way, that that's discussed. But I do appreciate  
14 that very much. And I do hope that moving forward  
15 what happened in my district wouldn't happen in  
16 another community. But I thank you very much for  
17 your testimony.

18 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Council  
19 Member Cumbo. The last person on my list is Council  
20 Member David Greenfield. We're going to call on him  
21 now. Council Member Greenfield/

22 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Thank you,  
23 Chair Weprin. I want to thank you first for your  
24 testimony today. I want to thank everybody that came  
25 out here. Just so that you know, for folks who are

2 looking at the Council Member's coming and going, all  
3 of us serve on multiple committees. And so, we will  
4 be coming and out during the course of the day  
5 because we may have other hearings going on at the  
6 same time. It doesn't mean that we don't pay close  
7 attention to this particular hearing, and all of us  
8 have staff who stay behind and take notes. And you  
9 may see us come and go. Just to let you know as  
10 context for why it is that members are coming and  
11 leaving is because we serve on many different  
12 committees. And many of them, one concurrently, in  
13 fact. For example, Council Member Cumbo just chaired  
14 a hearing this morning at the exact same time.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: I'm still  
16 chairing.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: You're still  
18 chairing. Well, that's a neat trick. You'll have to  
19 teach me how that works later.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: I'll show you one  
21 day.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Okay, great,  
23 and she's still chairing a hearing as she sits here  
24 at this committee. And so, that's just an example of  
25 why folks are going in and out of this group, folks

1 in the audience and folks who are watching this at  
2 home. I just sort of want to, I guess, recap because  
3 a lot has been said today about a lot of different  
4 issues. I just want to sort of focus on, you know, a  
5 lot of the outstanding issues that we still have, and  
6 just try to get some clarity. Just so that folks who  
7 are here, and folks who are watching at home sort of  
8 understand in terms of what's still outstanding  
9 before the subcommittee and full committee votes.

11 So on the issue of affordability, we've  
12 heard a couple of different things today. So I just  
13 want to clarify. So we understand that the-- Based  
14 on the proposed Zoning Text Amendment by City  
15 Planning, that it would-- you could build 20% at 80.  
16 Twenty-percent of the property at 80% AMI, which is  
17 what you've indicated that you're looking to do. Or,  
18 alternative, you could build a hybrid where it would  
19 be a 10% at 80% and 25% at 125. And then,  
20 potentially another 20% at 175 AMI. So one thing I  
21 just want to be clear because it just seems like  
22 we've heard different things on this particular issue  
23 today. So the plan right now is currently to build  
24 20% at AMI-- 20% at 80% AMI? Is that your current  
25 plan?

2 HOWARD WEISS: Yes.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: That's your  
4 current plan. Okay. However, you're not comfortable  
5 with the idea of striking that cause within the  
6 Zoning Text Amendment that would potentially allow  
7 you to change that plan. Is that also correct?

8 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Well, I don't know if we  
9 would strike it only because it would lead to the  
10 creation of more affordable housing. So we wouldn't  
11 strike it for that reason, but other than that, our  
12 plan is 20% on 80 of AMI.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Okay, so this  
14 gets back to Council Member Constantinides' point  
15 before, which was so that if you are okay with 20%  
16 then you would have no objection to the Council  
17 solidifying that and making it clear that at the  
18 middle it would have to be 20% affordability at 80%  
19 AMI. And then taking out the opportunity to change  
20 those numbers later to 10% at 80 and 20% at 175 for  
21 example. Is that correct?

22 HOWARD WEISS: As of now, yes, that's--.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: [interposing]  
24 Okay. Well, that's good. So that's a good starting  
25 point at least just so we know where we're at from

1 there. I think the other remaining issues and issues  
2 obviously that we're going to discuss with the  
3 Council Member are around the other areas of  
4 affordability. As you know, there are a wide varying  
5 views of affordability. Council Member Williams  
6 pointed out that he doesn't believe that 80% or 120%  
7 is affordable, and those are conversations that we  
8 know are going to continue with the Council Member to  
9 try see if you can get to a point where there is a  
10 comfort level with the broader issues of  
11 affordability.  
12

13 I want to touch upon the issue of labor  
14 because there is also just a little bit of confusion.  
15 Just to clarify that as well. Obviously, the way we  
16 look at it, and just, you know, and I think Council  
17 Member Crowley actually raised a similar point. But  
18 the way that we look at it in the Council is that yes  
19 technically there is no actual public subsidy as will  
20 be defined by the Administration. But the fact that  
21 we take an area right now that's essentially  
22 warehouses and we allow a developer to convert into  
23 housing, which, therefore, provides significant  
24 upside to the developer. That on its own we consider  
25 that to obviously be the biggest of subsidies, which

2 I imagine that you would agree with. And so part of  
3 our concern is when we look at these projects  
4 holistically, we say, Well, what are the issues that  
5 matter to us the most. And one of the issues that  
6 matters is that we want to make sure that a building  
7 will be built that is a quality building. And I  
8 think a project of this size, quite frankly, I don't  
9 even think it's feasible that you can do a non-union  
10 project of this size. Just because the expertise,  
11 quite frankly, isn't there. So certainly, you want  
12 to have folks who have that background and training.  
13 And obviously the other thing is that we want to make  
14 sure that when we're giving what we consider the  
15 subsidy of allowing people to build up and profit  
16 from something was, in fact, a warehouse that those,  
17 in fact, create good jobs. And that's where the  
18 project labor agreement is something that we're  
19 concerned about as well. So just to be clear on that  
20 point. You have an offer outstanding on your part,  
21 and you're waiting to hear back. But you are  
22 certainly committed to make sure that this is a union  
23 project. Just so we're all on the same page.

24

25

2 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Yeah, I think we've made  
3 our intention clear to Building Trades and to Service  
4 employees also.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Okay, so the  
6 answer is yes. You're absolutely committed to making  
7 sure this is a union project both from the Building  
8 Trades perspective and the 32BJ service perspective  
9 as well.

10 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Yeah, I don't think  
11 there are any outstanding issues left with the  
12 Trades. There is maybe one outstanding issue with  
13 Service.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Okay, that's  
15 fair, but I just wanted to make sure the commitment  
16 is there on your end. Is that correct?

17 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Yeah, we've been dealing  
18 with them, and we think yes.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Okay, very  
20 good. So once again, those issues are still to be  
21 resolved, and we're going to be watching that  
22 closely. Many council members have made it clear  
23 that they obviously would not vote for a project that  
24 didn't have those issues resolved. And so, we're  
25 looking forward to that being resolved as well.



2           The final issue that I want to raise, and  
3 I'm just going to make a small note on the other side  
4 is transportation. Because the transportation issue  
5 is a big one. I think that we've heard from the  
6 experts that based on the Environmental Impact Study  
7 that there will be increased traffic already in an  
8 area that very congested. The trains are going to be  
9 used a little bit more obviously than they currently  
10 are. And we're currently going to see more people,  
11 and as a result more traffic.

12           So one of the key items, of course that  
13 the community and Council Member has been pushing is  
14 the idea of a ferry, right, which would transport  
15 folks to the City and allow them to get there in a  
16 quicker fashion to take folks off of both the city  
17 streets and public transportation. So just to be  
18 clear about that, you're supportive of that concept,  
19 as well. Is that correct?

20           JOHN MAVROUDIS: Yes.

21           COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Okay, and so  
22 to the extent that you've made some accommodations,  
23 and I think we've heard that before from your  
24 planning experts, that there are going to be some  
25 accommodations. Those accommodations are what? Do

2 you have some space? Are you going to build a dock  
3 for example? I'm just trying to understand what it  
4 means when you say you've made accommodations to that  
5 end that would allow a ferry to be built there in the  
6 future. And to be clear, by the way, I think a ferry  
7 would be beneficial from a business perspective as  
8 well. you can market a location say, Hey, we've got  
9 a ferry. You can get the city in 15 minutes. I  
10 think that makes it a lot more attractive as well.  
11 Is that fair?

12 JOHN MAVROUDIS: That's fair. We've  
13 crated a physical placeholder for the construction of  
14 the dock in terms of where it will be built, and then  
15 leaving the land associated with it open for that  
16 function. Further to that, we are still actually  
17 thinking ourselves of how we can help support the  
18 deployment of the construction of the dock. We  
19 haven't figured that out yet, but we're thinking  
20 about it.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Okay. So  
22 that's helpful. So that's something that you would  
23 consider in terms of the actual waterfront of a dock.  
24 We can't do that it without the location. So that's  
25 an important piece, and I think it's something that

1 you're going to discuss with the Council Member as  
2 well. And I would say on the related point that  
3 Council Member Cumbo and the Public Advocate brought  
4 up in regards to the Brooklyn Jewish Hospital, I  
5 would say it is an important point to clarify. And I  
6 think the concern there is that it does go directly  
7 related to the issue of affordability in terms of the  
8 intention of whether you're going to build what I  
9 discussed before. Which is are you going to build  
10 20% and 80% of AMI or are you going to build, or are  
11 you going to be 10 and 15 or 10 and 20? There is an  
12 issue over there as well. So do you mind just giving  
13 us some background so that we have a greater  
14 understanding of what happened over there. Because  
15 it's obviously an issue of concern in terms of how it  
16 was handled. And it seems like at the very least  
17 there was a significant miscommunication or non-  
18 communication perhaps between the partnership that  
19 has a piece of this. Which obviously has a piece of  
20 this project as well, and at least the community  
21 leaders and the local elected officials. So can you  
22 sort of just give us a quick history or summary of  
23 where we're at on that, and what you're looking to do  
24 on that particular project?  
25

2 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Yes. So just to clarify  
3 from the beginning, the project in question in  
4 Brooklyn and Crown Heights is not and has never been  
5 an affordable housing development. It was a market  
6 rate development. It was built completely with  
7 private money, no subsidy. And it was a phased-in  
8 project over the course of seven years. It was  
9 formerly a hospital building. The hospital sold it,  
10 the building to Alma, or the campus rather, and they  
11 proceeded to develop one building at a time. In  
12 anticipation of receiving a J-51 Tax abatement, the  
13 developer used a form of lease, which is identical to  
14 the rent stabilization lease form. As part of the  
15 requirements for obtaining a J-51, the apartments  
16 must be given Rent Stabilization Lease forms. And  
17 then registered as rent stabilized apartments once  
18 the tax abatement is granted.

19 Because of the nature of the construction  
20 and the time frame in which this phase in development  
21 occurred, the HPD application did not grant the tax  
22 abatement to the developer because it did not meet  
23 certain criteria that revolved around time frames.  
24 Because this property was one block, and that the  
25 original building permit started the clock on the J-

2 51 application. But because it was a phased-in  
3 development over time, the developer missed that  
4 four-year window that HPD allows for the granting of  
5 the tax abatement. The developer was notified of  
6 this, and that was it. And they decided basically to  
7 convert those rent stabilized lease forms into market  
8 rate lease forms.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Okay, I mean  
10 you can see how that could be honestly pretty  
11 confusing right for tenants who are coming in. And  
12 they have rent stabilized lease forms, and then it  
13 sort of gets swapped. And it seems like just from  
14 once again just from reading the media reports that  
15 there wasn't a lot of clarity. So I have two  
16 questions in this regard. The first is did you reach  
17 out to any of the local other community leaders or  
18 elected officials to discuss this issue? And also  
19 have you discussed this issue with the administration  
20 in terms of the possibility of trying to get back the  
21 J-51?

22 JOHN MAVROUDIS: So this issue first came  
23 to light back in March of 2014. That's when the  
24 first tenants were notified of the switch over from  
25 the rent stabilized lease form to the free market

1 lease form. Keep in mind even though the properties  
2 were never rent stabilized, the developer followed  
3 the form of rent stabilization increase throughout  
4 the period of basically the buildings were all one.  
5 [sic] So back in March the developer of the project  
6 met with the Tenants Association. The Tenant's  
7 Association also has their own legal counsel.

8  
9 Their counsel conferred with the  
10 developer's basic determination from HPD saying that  
11 it was his legal right to do so. And around April or  
12 May of 2014, it was probably the last meeting that  
13 the developer had with the Tenants Association  
14 regarding this. It's also to note that the developer  
15 is still in most cases following a rent stabilized  
16 form of increase. So it's not the form of lease  
17 that's changed, but the practice has really remained  
18 the same. And again, I want to reiterate it is not  
19 an affordable housing development.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Okay, not to  
21 quibble over it. I think that the proposed increase  
22 is significantly larger than the rent guidelines that  
23 he has agreed to for this year. Is that correct? I  
24 just want to make sure we get the fact straights.

2 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Well, as it relates to  
3 this year, the increase just came into effect. So  
4 I'm not sure what it is now. But going past the last  
5 seven years, it's been exactly the same.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Okay, I just  
7 once again I think it would be helpful to clear up  
8 this issue in terms of just once again to be clear,  
9 we don't vote on projects based on unrelated  
10 projects. But it does relate to the question of  
11 affordability under the current project in terms of  
12 the commitments that you made on this particular  
13 project. So I think that I would encourage you to  
14 continue those conversations with Council Member  
15 Cumbo and the other elected officials to try to get  
16 some greater clarity. And also to see if perhaps we  
17 can work with the administration to rectify this  
18 situation. So that the intent which was your intent  
19 originally to keep these units affordable that we can  
20 actually get that done.

21 JOHN MAVROUDIS: I would also like to  
22 stress how we look forward to meeting with anyone  
23 associated with this development. But in particular  
24 if there is anyway around the timeframe issues on the  
25 HPD J-51 applications. We would more than welcome

2 the opportunity to accept that abatement, and then  
3 keep the property rent stabilized. However, our  
4 attorney who filed the application advised us that it  
5 wasn't possible.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Okay, and  
7 then just a final related point. You know, there's a  
8 group, a well known group in New York now called  
9 Build Up NYC. They've raised some significant  
10 issues, which Council Member Cumbo just raised about  
11 some subcontractor, which relates to a bigger issue  
12 as well that we're concerned about. We want to make  
13 sure that the contractors and the subcontractors are  
14 the ones who are doing good work, and obviously fed  
15 all of their employees. So to be clear on that  
16 incident that happened, you're saying that was an  
17 aberration and it won't happen again, and you're  
18 putting in place measures to make sure that it won't  
19 happen again?

20 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Yeah, well in terms of  
21 the hiring practices of our general contractors to  
22 his subcontractors, we didn't previously have any  
23 control. We currently reworking our agreements  
24 between our general contractors to include control  
25 over the hiring of subcontractors, and obviously



2 their track records, the approval of their track  
3 records.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: So for the  
5 future you will have that control, and you will have  
6 that review in place?

7 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Absolutely.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: And then so  
9 the final point I just want to make is that we're  
10 not-- There was a very good presentation that was  
11 made by your planning expert. It's not that we're  
12 not excited by this. We certainly are. All of us I  
13 think. We're pro-development. We want to see good  
14 things happen. We want to see housing. We want to  
15 see affordable housing. We're certainly pleased by  
16 the open space plan in terms of how that will  
17 continue access. But at the same time, there are  
18 greater issues. I don't want those issues to detract  
19 or to imply in any way, shape, or form that we are  
20 not excited by the opportunity to develop this  
21 particular neighborhood. I think that we are, and I  
22 think that the plan especially in terms of the  
23 aesthetics of the plan is something that is  
24 significant and is impressive. But these are key  
25 outstanding issues. Just the nature of the hearings.

2 Because our time is limited, we tend not to focus on  
3 the good, and we tend to focus on the good, and we  
4 tend to focus on the issues that are still  
5 outstanding. So to be clear, we certainly appreciate  
6 the time and the effort and the thought that has gone  
7 into this. However, these are some critical issues  
8 that need to be resolved, obviously, these issues are  
9 going to have to be resolved before the subcommittee  
10 and committee votes on this. So with that, I want to  
11 thank you for your testimony, and I look forward to  
12 hearing ongoing conversations with all the relevant  
13 parties to make sure that we get these issues  
14 resolved over the next weeks before we go onto this  
15 proposal. Thank you very much.

16 JOHN MAVROUDIS: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Council  
18 Member Greenfield. And I think Council Member  
19 Greenfield summed up a lot of the key issues that we  
20 have before us today on affordable housing, of  
21 transportation, of skilled local workers, and those  
22 issues. The last thing I just want to ask, and I  
23 want to be clear on the record, Mr. Weiss. I know  
24 the issue was raised about the way it was done in the  
25 past, and why this is any different than it was in

2 the past. And you made a point of saying that this  
3 is historic in the fact that it's the first time it's  
4 been agreed to ahead of time, mandated that a full  
5 20% of affordable housing. I know Public Advocate  
6 James and Council Member Reynoso raised the issue of  
7 we've had this before. And that sometimes we didn't  
8 meet the goals of what people agreed to after the  
9 fact. Can you explain once more for the record how  
10 this is different than the way it used to be done.

11           HOWARD WEISS: For the first time if this  
12 Council approves this application and amends the  
13 zoning law to allow a residential development at this  
14 site, this developer will be required, if it is to  
15 develop and residences at this site, to provide  
16 affordable housing. It's never been required before.

17           CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: And what does that  
18 mean to be required? What penalties are there? How  
19 do we know that you definitely have to be required to  
20 build at least that?

21           HOWARD WEISS: The developer will not be  
22 permitted to develop a single unit of residence at  
23 this property without including 20% affordability.

24           CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay, and the  
25 difference is in the past when we had-- that it was

2 agreed to build a certain amount of affordable  
3 housing that has generally been done by a public  
4 benefit agreement or by agreement to sort of take our  
5 word for it, as opposed to being required.

6 JOHN MAVROUDIS: No, the zoning text  
7 before this amendment provided that they, for  
8 example, in a R73 district, provided a base FAR of  
9 3.75. The developer then was given the option to  
10 provide affordable housing and then get a bump up in  
11 the FAR from 1.25 to FAR of 5.0. Here, what City  
12 Planning has done and mandated working with us was to  
13 allow in the R73 district, 5.0 FAR and it has to be  
14 affordable.

15 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: [interposing] And  
16 the--

17 HOWARD WEISS: There is no option.

18 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: The distinction I'm  
19 trying to make is also you're referring to  
20 inclusionary housing and someone opting into an  
21 inclusionary housing plan. What happened often in  
22 our things, someone may not have even have opted into  
23 an inclusionary housing plan. But in the end, made  
24 an agreement, I will give you 20% of affordable  
25 housing. That was not always a binding agreement,

2 which was done in writing. But there were occasions  
3 where people didn't meet the goals. You're saying  
4 that this because it's inclusionary housing, and it's  
5 mandated, you are required in order to build any  
6 units to have this.

7           HOWARD WEISS: That's correct, and more  
8 typically what would happen is a developer could get  
9 the zoning map changed, and then just go ahead and  
10 develop a 3.75 FAR and not put in a stip for  
11 affordable housing. And still take advantage of the  
12 fact that the City Council changed the zoning to  
13 allow residences in that profitable development  
14 without--

15           CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: [interposing] Great.

16           HOWARD WEISS: --and residences ever  
17 being development.

18           CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: [interposing]

19 Correct.

20           HOWARD WEISS: Any affordable being  
21 developed.

22           CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: I did want to just  
23 establish for the record that, you know, what the  
24 Bloomberg Administration down, and now what the de  
25 Blasio Administration has put into place is something

2 very different. That this mandate is for first time  
3 ever that this puts the teeth into mandating  
4 affordable housing. Whatever happens with this  
5 project, but it mandates that 20% for this, and in  
6 theory, and hopefully, in future projects that take  
7 place in this city.

8           HOWARD WEISS: Yes, Mr. Council Member,  
9 and if I may, there's one other significant change,  
10 which is this project is going forward with out  
11 public subsidy. Meaning apart from tax abatements,  
12 city funds to support the affordable units. The new  
13 Zoning Text that travels with this project will allow  
14 City Planning, if the developer in the future wants  
15 to avail itself of any subsidy, will allow City  
16 Planning to open it up again. And to require a  
17 greater percentage of affordable units to allow that  
18 public subsidy.

19           CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay, thank you, Mr.  
20 Weiss. Well, we'll excuse you now. You guys can  
21 take a break. As I mentioned, and I'm just going to  
22 recap what we're doing here. Some of you came late.  
23 We're now going to call on a number of elected  
24 officials who are here, and them have the opportunity  
25 on behalf of the community and on behalf of the City

2 of New York to speak on this project. Then we are  
3 going to go to panels. We're going to start out in  
4 opposition, a panel in opposition, and a panel in  
5 favor. We have a lot of people here to testify. We  
6 have to limit the people that are going to be  
7 testifying on those panels in favor and in opposition  
8 to two minutes a person. I apologize. You will be  
9 on a clock with an annoying buzzer at the end. So if  
10 you try to-- In your mind try to make a synopsis as  
11 much as possible.

12 All right, I'd like to call on the  
13 following elected officials who we are privileged to  
14 have joined us. Controller Scott Stringer, Borough  
15 President of Brooklyn Eric Adams, and Assembly Member  
16 Walter Mosley. We are also--

17 [Pause]

18 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay, got it. All  
19 right. Good. I know Council Member Melinda Katz is  
20 on her way here, but we're going to do this panel  
21 without her, and she's going to come a little later  
22 on, and we're going to have her testify then. So,  
23 gentlemen, we're going to let I guess let Comptroller  
24 Stringer in protocol, even though he was the last one  
25 here, but he does represent the most people, Borough

2 President Adams. So I apologize. So we'll go in  
3 reverse order, guys. And Mr. Stringer, whenever  
4 you're ready. It's good to see you again.

5 SCOTT STRINGER: Well, thank you, Chair  
6 Weprin and members of the Subcommittee on Land Use,  
7 Zoning and Franchises for the opportunity to speak  
8 today on the proposed Astoria Cove development. The  
9 developer Alma Realty is before you seeking greater  
10 density, with lax design guidelines and a text  
11 amendment that would allow them to construct a mixed  
12 residential and retail large scale development. In  
13 total, the actions before you would permit Alma  
14 Realty to construct over two million square feet  
15 including over 1,700 units of housing across five  
16 buildings. Without the rezoning, they can only build  
17 200 units of housing and light manufacturing. In  
18 exchange for this 1,500 unit windfall, Alma Realty is  
19 submitting a plan that would set aside 20% of its  
20 units as affordable housing.

21 Astoria Cove is the first privately  
22 developed affordable housing plan to be subject to  
23 mandatory inclusionary zoning. And as a result, this  
24 proposal will set a precedent for our city. But a  
25 deeper analysis calls into question whether or not



1 these units are truly affordable. The stakes are too  
2 high not to get this right. Under the City's Non-  
3 Mandatory Inclusionary Housing Program, 20% of all  
4 affordable housing units must be available to low-  
5 income New Yorkers. The new mandatory rules,  
6 however, give the developer the option to reduce the  
7 number of low income units to only ten percent of  
8 approximately 173 apartments. Under this scenario,  
9 the developer would need to make another 20% of the  
10 building affordable to middle-income tenants.  
11

12           The difference is simple. Instead of the  
13 majority of the units being affordable to a single  
14 person making \$48,000 a year, the majority of the  
15 units would be affordable to a single person making  
16 over \$100,000 a year. Potential rents could be as  
17 high as \$2,700. This is higher than the average  
18 market rate rents for Astoria, and nearly two times  
19 higher than the rest of Queens. The bottom line is  
20 that \$2,700 for a one-bedroom apartment is market  
21 rate for this neighborhood. Not affordable. If  
22 we're going to meet the City's goal to create 200,000  
23 affordable housing units, they cannot be made through  
24 this kind of deal. To make matters worse is Alma  
25 Realty is seeking rezoning approval.

2           It is trying to deregulate 700 affordable  
3 units of Brooklyn Jewish Hospital apartments. While  
4 I recognize that I'm a former borough president, so I  
5 recognize that from a strict land use law perspective  
6 these issues are separate. But it would be  
7 malfeasance to ignore what Alma is doing in real time  
8 in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. This must be on the  
9 record. The residents of Brooklyn Jewish Hospital  
10 Apartments entered into a contract with Alma in a  
11 good faith deal that should not be stripped away.  
12 This realty company is running a shell game across  
13 two boroughs where they provide a little affordable  
14 housing with one hand, and take away with another.  
15 So we have to send a strong message, and I'm asking  
16 the City Council to take a hard look at the proposed  
17 Astoria Cove Affordable Housing Plan with as few as  
18 173 units could be truly affordable.

19           The developer must dig deeper at Astoria  
20 Cove. We should increase the percentage of  
21 affordable units, and second at a rate New Yorkers  
22 can actually afford. And, as Council Member  
23 Greenfield brought up, ensure that the development  
24 provide good jobs this community deserves. Moreover,  
25 I ask that you not ignore the tenants across the city

2 like those in Crown Heights seeking a fair deal from  
3 Alma. We have a responsibility to hold this  
4 developer accountable in Queens, in Brooklyn and  
5 wherever else these tactics surface. Let's not add  
6 173 truly affordable housing units, and lose 700.  
7 That is no way to reach our collective goal. I thank  
8 this Council for giving us the opportunity to speak,  
9 for looking at these very complicated issues. I'm  
10 happy to be here today with Borough President Adams  
11 and Assembly Member Mosley, who are representing the  
12 Borough of Brooklyn in a way that I think speaks to  
13 their desire to get something done for their people  
14 as well. And I thank you being in the Council.

15 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you  
16 Comptroller Stringer and I am delighted to see you  
17 joined by our Brooklyn Colleagues. I can't help but  
18 comment so this bill, this project is in the shadow  
19 in the Triborough Bridge, and you guys don't  
20 represent any of those Triboroughs. So, what brings  
21 you here today?

22 ERIC ADAMS: Well, we know that Brooklyn  
23 is the center of the universe. So I just want to  
24 make sure. [laughs]

2 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Touché. We love  
3 Brooklyn.

4 ERIC ADAMS: Yeah, thank you so much,  
5 Council Member Weprin and good morning. As you  
6 stated, my name is Eric Adams. I am the Brooklyn  
7 Borough President, and I want to thank you, the  
8 Chair, for allowing us to speak today. And we're  
9 clear that some of our issues do not impact the  
10 decision you're making. You're making a unique  
11 decision on a particular project. We're clear that,  
12 you know, some of our issues do not impact the  
13 decision you are making. You're making a unique  
14 decision on a particular project. We're clear that  
15 or we believe that all of this information should be  
16 taken in its totality. We, and I want to join the  
17 Comptroller that we have to be careful with funding  
18 now. We can't add in one area and subtract in  
19 another. This is not that old street game called  
20 Three-Card Monte, where you have to find the housing  
21 card. We need to make sure of that.

22 Last week it came to my office's  
23 attention that Alma Realty has plans to deregulate a  
24 much needed J-51 rent stabilized apartment impacting  
25 the lives over 1,000 tenants who call 545 Prospect

2 Place their home. In fact, I've lived one block down  
3 from that for the last 25 years. This action would  
4 be done in the interest of simply boasting their  
5 bottom line. The vast majority of the residents of  
6 545 Prospect have rent regulated leases. Yet, no  
7 notice was given that their rents will be increased  
8 by up to 15%. Alma's actions couldn't have happened  
9 at a worse time in the Crown Heights area. Rents in  
10 the neighborhood have nearly doubled in the past  
11 year, and they continue to rise. At the same time,  
12 household incomes in the neighborhood have either  
13 stagnated or remain below what is needed for hard  
14 laboring Brooklynites and New Yorkers.

15 This action is counter to Mary de  
16 Blasio's goals of creating and preserving 200,000  
17 units of affordable housing throughout the city. If  
18 Alma is allowed to proceed with this plan, it will  
19 set a new precedent that would threaten affordable  
20 housing not only in Crown Heights but also in Queens  
21 with the project that they are proposing. We cannot  
22 let this happen. We need to take appropriate actions  
23 to make sure that we continue to have communities  
24 that will be there for middle-class and low-income

2 New Yorkers. And so, I am requesting on three items  
3 that we must do.

4 1. We must ensure that jobs when we  
5 build housing in this city are union jobs, and we  
6 must ensure that people who are building the housing  
7 can afford to live in the housing.

8 2. We must not participate with bait  
9 and switch developers that want to destabilize rent  
10 stabilized apartments.

11 3. As elected, we are the last fort,  
12 and we cannot become Fort Surrender. We must become  
13 Fort Defender and defend the housing stock in our  
14 city.

15 Lastly, there is enough for human need.  
16 There is not enough for human greed, and there is a  
17 lot of greed in this city that we cannot continue to  
18 participate in. Not in the borough of Brooklyn and  
19 not in the other four boroughs that we call the City  
20 of New York. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Mr.  
22 Borough President. Assemblyman Mosley. I know I  
23 spoke to your colleague last night, Linda Rosenthal,  
24 who was leaving the Stringer residence because it was  
25 Max's bedtime. But she expressed a lot of the same

2 feelings of the Comptroller, and she mentioned that  
3 you will be sharing some of her views as well.

4           WALTER MOSLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman  
5 and to my colleagues on the Council thank you for  
6 this opportunity to testify before this committee.  
7 As the New York State Assembly Member representing  
8 the 57th Assembly District, which in part includes  
9 Prospect Heights and parts of Crown Heights. And as  
10 a member of the Housing Committee of the New York  
11 State Assembly, I testify here today to inform you  
12 that the precarious housing situation that is  
13 happening between the members of my community and the  
14 landlord Alma Realty. I believe that this  
15 information, in part, as was noted by Council Member  
16 Cumbo about trust is pertinent to the ongoing uniform  
17 land use process, which is underway to determine if  
18 Alma Realty should be approved to build New York  
19 City's largest housing development in recent history,  
20 Astoria Cove.

21           In the early 2000s, Alma Realty purchased  
22 the properties around Prospect Place and Classon  
23 Avenue in the Crown Heights area of Brooklyn,  
24 formerly the site of the Brooklyn Jewish Hospital run  
25 by the Interfaith Medical Center. Now, this hospital

2 complex was then turned into nine apartment buildings  
3 with roughly 700 residential units. When the tenants  
4 were first offered leases to the apartments in the  
5 building complex, they were given Department of  
6 Housing Community Renewal Riders. Riders which  
7 indicated that those units were rent stabilized and  
8 afforded all the protections, that were provided  
9 under the Rent Stabilization Act. At the beginning  
10 of the month of September of this year upon receiving  
11 lease renewals tenants were alarmed to see that they  
12 were being offered market rate rents.

13           Upon calls to building management, Alma  
14 Realty stated that the company applied for J-51 tax  
15 abatements for the hospital complex, which would have  
16 required by law that the apartment units be  
17 classified as rent stabilized as long as the tax  
18 abatement was in place on the property. But were  
19 eventually denied. Upon request by my office to the  
20 Department of Housing Preservation and Development,  
21 the City agency that processes J-51 Abatement  
22 Applications, we learned that Alma Realty had applied  
23 for J-51 abatement. However, the application process  
24 was never completed by Alma Realty, and thus deemed  
25 withdrawn by HPD. Due to the unprecedented legal



2 nature of this complex housing situation, it is  
3 crucial that the Legal Department of both the State  
4 Agency DHCR and the City Agency HPD look carefully  
5 into this, and consider a favorable resolution that  
6 benefits the needs of the community.

7           After the legality of the situation is  
8 sorted out, the lives of over a thousand tenants will  
9 be impacted. Rents in the Crown Heights area of  
10 Brooklyn have nearly increased by 10.5% over the past  
11 year alone with the median income for the community  
12 has stagnated around roughly \$41,000 a year for the  
13 past decade. This situation coupled with the fact  
14 that Alma Realty's track record of poor labor  
15 practices has brought me here today to speak out.  
16 The fact that on September 26th of 2014, SS High Rise  
17 Construction was ordered by the State Supreme Court  
18 to pay \$1.6 million back wages for overtime in 2011  
19 because the company paid White workers \$25 an hour,  
20 Black Workers \$18.00 an hour, and Latino workers \$15  
21 an hour, should have us stop and seriously question  
22 the intent of Alma Realty.

23           Now, I will continue to advocate for the  
24 residents of Brooklyn Jewish Hospital Housing Complex  
25 because the loss of nearly 700 units or rent

1 stabilized housing will have a blow and an impact on  
2 the community that we don't think we can ever  
3 survive. Moreover, I believe what Alma Realty is  
4 attempting to do is out of line with the Mayor's  
5 Affordable Housing Plan, which calls upon not only  
6 creating roughly 80,000 units of affordable housing,  
7 but to preserve roughly 120,000 units so hard working  
8 New Yorkers have a place to live, and have a place to  
9 raise their families.  
10

11           Now, I fervently hope that you will take  
12 this information into consideration in part when  
13 making your decision about Alma Realty's Astoria Cove  
14 project. As elected officials, we are beholding to  
15 the people of New York to make decisions that impact  
16 their lives, and shape the very physical existence of  
17 our communities. The decision of which private  
18 entity government chooses to work with and to provide  
19 tax breaks to is a very weighted process, and must be  
20 entered into carefully. I thank you for this  
21 opportunity to speak here today, and I hope that we  
22 can come to a resolution to preserve affordable  
23 housing, but most importantly to preserve the  
24 integrity of the Council and of the City at large.  
25

2 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Mr.  
3 Mosley. We are delighted to be joined, and in  
4 perfect timing, by the Borough President of my  
5 borough of Queens where Astoria Cove is located and  
6 Borough President Melinda Katz. Welcome.

7 MELINDA KATZ: [off mic] Good morning.  
8 Nice to be back. Nice to be back in my old house.  
9 So thank you Chair Weprin, Chair Greenfield. And may  
10 I start this by saying how great it is that Queens is  
11 getting all this attention. I love that. Thank you.  
12 There you go. I want to thank Costa Constantinides  
13 for the great work that he has done on this. I can  
14 tell you that we are in constant contact, and he is a  
15 great council member who wants the best for his  
16 district, and as important the best for Queens. And  
17 I think that those two are really the same. So I'm  
18 excited to be working with him. To Comptroller  
19 Stringer and to Borough President Adams, welcome.

20 This is about Astoria Cove and this is  
21 about one of the largest projects really in the  
22 Borough of Queens. I have testimony that will be  
23 handed in. But if I might, New York development is  
24 always welcome in the Borough of Queens and in New  
25 York City. It has the potential of creating well

2 paying construction jobs, and permanent jobs, and  
3 results in new housing clearly. And in the Borough  
4 of Queens, as many of you know, I have created a  
5 mantra that said we are the world's borough, and you  
6 should be able to get a job, work, educate your  
7 children, go to anything you want in the Borough of  
8 Queens. You never have to go over a tunnel, or over  
9 a bridge or under a tunnel to get that.

10 I do believe that creating responsible  
11 development and permanent living wage jobs in the  
12 Borough of Queens is part of that development in this  
13 great borough. The proposed Astoria Cover project  
14 promises to transform a very underutilized  
15 manufacturing area into a new community. New  
16 housing, a publicly accessible waterfront, open  
17 space, a new school, and a much needed supermarket.  
18 And I have to tell you that as much communication as  
19 we have had with Alma, and all of the players in  
20 this. We've had various discussions. Nobody I think  
21 doesn't know where everyone stands on this. And I  
22 just want to be clear, though, that there has been  
23 good communication. But Community Board 1 in the  
24 Borough of Queens and I have asked for much more  
25 affordable housing. I believe that the Mayor's 20%

2 Inclusionary Mandatory Housing that's affordable  
3 throughout this borough is great, and I think that  
4 it's a great policy to follow.

5 I do think that certain projects in the  
6 City of New York can go further. And so having a bar  
7 or a base of 20% is good, but let's do more where we  
8 can do more. The Community Board has asked for 35%.  
9 I believe that at 20% of the housing units it's just  
10 not enough especially at 80% AMI. We have a family  
11 of our working for \$60,000, \$70,000 a year. Folks in  
12 the community are going to get priced out. They're  
13 just not going to be able to live there. I'm also  
14 concerned about community priority and making sure  
15 that we keep the community how it is, and make sure  
16 that we're not having grandfathers and grandmothers  
17 who want to help raise their children or there  
18 grandchildren so that the children go out and work  
19 aren't able to live in the community.

20 My recommendation is that we either lower  
21 the AMI or we expand the unit or, by the way, we do  
22 both. Because I do think that this has the potential  
23 of being not only expanding units, but also to lower  
24 the AMI for folks that live there. We also need  
25 transportation. We need a ferry service. We've got

2 to get folks in now. We can't be building  
3 communities in the Borough of Queens when people  
4 can't get into work, out to work, take their kids to  
5 school. It just doesn't work, and transportation in  
6 that community is just under-- It's just no good,  
7 and we need to make sure that we expand that to ferry  
8 service or to other great transportation  
9 opportunities.

10 We also have to make sure, Mr. Chair,  
11 that it's built well. When I say built well, this is  
12 a 1,700-unit in the Borough of Queens. It's one of  
13 the largest projects going in. You cannot build this  
14 project without thinking that it should be trade,  
15 without thinking that we need apprenticeships.  
16 Without thinking that you need good trained workers  
17 building this project. We also want to make sure  
18 that after the workers are finished doing what they  
19 do best, that we have good paying living wage jobs  
20 after. I know there has been a lot of discussion of  
21 Alma, and what's going on in other parts of the  
22 District of Queens and also other boroughs. But I  
23 believe that if you're going to build 1,700 units in  
24 this area, you need to make sure that the workers are  
25 paid and paid well.

2 I do hope that this is the beginning of a  
3 conversation. I wanted to come here today to show  
4 that we do want development in the Borough, but it  
5 has to be responsible development. And it can't be  
6 any of less than would be required anywhere else in  
7 the City of New York. Queens cannot expect less.  
8 And so every single time we have a big development  
9 come up, I will be here to talk about what I expect,  
10 and what the elected officials and what the  
11 communities expect from this development. You have a  
12 very, very hard job in front of you, Councilman  
13 Constantinides as you move forward in negotiating  
14 this. We know that you will do the best, but as it  
15 stands now, as Borough President, I cannot support  
16 the project.

17 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Madam  
18 Borough President. Anyone on the panel have a  
19 question for our distinguished panel? Council Member  
20 Greenfield and then Council Member Miller. Sorry  
21 about that, Daneek.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Really a  
23 comment more than a question. I think first of all,  
24 all of the excited leadership of Council Member  
25 Constantinides I can just tell you as Chair of Land

2 Use Astorians have no greater advocate than the  
3 Council Member who is fighting for him. And I think  
4 we all appreciate that, and I think he appreciates  
5 support with really a Who's Who of elected officials  
6 who have come out here today. It's never everyday  
7 that we get such prestigious guests in the City  
8 Council, and so it's good to have you. I just want  
9 to thank you for giving voice to the voices on this  
10 issue. I'll start on bias. I'll start with my own  
11 Borough President, Eric Adams. I want to thank you  
12 for speaking out on the affordable housing issues  
13 and, of course, our Controller. We appreciate your  
14 advocacy as well. I didn't realize that there are  
15 late night meetings with Assembly Members going on in  
16 your apartment. Now, I know. I'll be coming over  
17 for dinner one of these days.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KATZ: [laughs] You're  
19 invited.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: A strict  
21 disclosure just FYI, and our Queens Borough President  
22 and former Land Use Chair for her tenacity. I'm very  
23 grateful for that and, of course, Assembly Member  
24 Walter Mosley, who first raised the alarm on the  
25 local issue in his community. I'm grateful as well.



2 So I just wanted to thank you. It's certainly  
3 helpful to get this feedback and insight from our  
4 elected leaders, and it will definitely help us in  
5 terms of our deliberations, and we appreciate your  
6 support with the Council and, of course, the Council  
7 Member as well.

8 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Council  
9 Member Greenfield. I think Costa Constantinides not  
10 only appreciates the support, but I think that people  
11 can say correctly Constantinides. That's been a big  
12 deal. That's been a big deal.

13 MELINDA KATZ: [interposing] I see him  
14 all the time. [sic]

15 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Council Member  
16 Miller.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: Good afternoon.  
18 Thank you, Chair Weprin, and to the other members of  
19 the Council and Council Member Costa for his--  
20 [laughter] He's on two of my committees so I've got  
21 to say it all the time, but for your leadership on  
22 this issue. And to the distinguished panel I thank  
23 you all so much for being here today and lending your  
24 voice with the Borough President, the Comptroller,  
25 and Assemblyman. We've all had individual

2 conversations about this. This is so important  
3 because we all stand for development in the City of  
4 New York, and around our various communities. But we  
5 want to make sure that it's responsible, and that  
6 it's done right. We've had extensive conversations  
7 about both in Jamaica, in Queens, the entire City,  
8 and it keeps coming back that we want to do it right.  
9 And I think whether or not the development happens,  
10 whether or not we vote is not the question. How we  
11 grow is our challenge. And so, I'm glad that  
12 everyone is here today to stand up and lend their  
13 voice to that challenge. So anything that I can do  
14 to continue to support this project as it moves  
15 forward because this sets the standard. And we will  
16 not have the standard be a precedent that we cannot  
17 live with. Not just in the Borough of Queens, but  
18 throughout the City of New York. So I thank you  
19 again. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Mr.  
21 Miller and the last comments are going to come from  
22 the aforementioned Constantinides.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: I want to  
24 thank all of you for being here today. Controller  
25 Stringer, I think you speak for everyone here in New

2 York City, and Borough President Adams, and  
3 Assemblyman Mosley thank you for raising these very  
4 deep concerns and representing your constituency  
5 beyond the best of your ability. You two have been  
6 strong advocates for affordable housing, and we  
7 definitely appreciate that. And Borough President  
8 Melinda Katz, I wanted to thank you on the record for  
9 your great work. Throughout this process you've been  
10 working as hard as possible providing great guidance  
11 for everyone in Astoria. So we are very lucky to  
12 have for a president. So I look forward to  
13 continuing working with you as we evolve this process  
14 and the City Council. Thank you all.

15 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay. Well, thank  
16 you all very much for coming. You guys can go out to  
17 lunch together now, and who's... I know Mosley is  
18 not buying, but what about which one of you guys is  
19 going to buy? Okay. All right, well thank you very  
20 much. I'll try to get decorum back here. I know  
21 there are a lot of people who are scheduled to  
22 testify many of whom have other things to do today,  
23 and didn't expect us to go this long. And we're just  
24 getting started. But we will read their name, and  
25 their position of everyone who did put a slip in. I

2 know some people had to leave, but in the meantime,  
3 we are going to call a panel in opposition to start.  
4 And then again right after that composition, a panel  
5 in favor. Again, we're going to put a two-minute  
6 clock on the wall there. I'd like to call up the  
7 following people. John Trent[sp?] Once again, John-  
8 -

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: [off mic]

10 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Robbie.  
11 John Trent, Maria Espinal. Is it Marlon Escodo or  
12 Marvin Escodo, and Fernando Mondano it looks like.

13 [background discussion]

14 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: And give those to  
15 the Sergeant-at-Arms. Those are the --

16 [Pause]

17 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: We've got four,  
18 good.

19 [Pause]

20 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: No. Sorry. Yeah,  
21 whenever you're ready, please state your name. You  
22 can decide who goes first, and please give your  
23 testimony, and then if there are any questions, we'll  
24 have the panel ask. Thank you.

2 JOHN TRENT: Thank you. My name is John  
3 Trent. I'm a representative of Build Up NYC from the  
4 Hotel Trades Council, and a long-time Astoria  
5 resident. Build Up NYC is an alliance of working men  
6 and women in construction, hotel, building  
7 maintenance and operation services working together  
8 to strengthen our middle class with good jobs and  
9 responsible real estate development. At Build Up  
10 we're fighting together to make sure developments  
11 like Astoria Cove benefit our communities. All the  
12 realty needs to make a strong commitment to  
13 affordable housing, environmental sustainability, and  
14 good safe jobs. This project can be done right if we  
15 all work together. All of Astoria should benefit,  
16 not just the developers.

17 Last year Build Up worked in partnership  
18 with Council Member Debbie Rose to ensure that Empire  
19 Outlets, which also went through ULURP provided real  
20 benefits to local communities including good jobs for  
21 local residents. We have the same opportunity at  
22 Astoria Cove. However, Alma's track record and  
23 history in NYC is the best way we can predict what  
24 Alma is likely to do in Astoria Cove without a  
25 binding commitment to the community. More powerful

1 than what Alma says is to look at what they are  
2 actually doing. Alma has proposed that only 20% of  
3 the 1,700 units will be affordable. The community  
4 needs more. However, in Crown Heights Alma has set  
5 market rate rent renewals to tenants that previously  
6 had rent regulated leases at the six-building  
7 Brooklyn Jewish Hospital complex that manages.

9 Elected officials have informed us that  
10 the tenants are estimating that roughly 700 units  
11 will be converted to market rate. This is  
12 approximately double the number of affordable units  
13 Alma intends adding to Astoria Cove representing an  
14 affordable housing net decrease. Our communities  
15 deserve real commitment that Alma would be a good  
16 landlord who will responsibly maintain its  
17 properties. Alma is failing tenants across the city.  
18 Just last week, Public Advocate Letitia James named  
19 1114 Ward Ave., LLC an LLC headed by Alma CEO Steve  
20 Valiotis, one of NYC's worst landlords. Alma and  
21 entities associated with Alma currently have more  
22 than 1,200 open HPD violations in their capacity as  
23 owner or landlord at their projects across the city.  
24 Alma's own Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment  
25 reveals that there is a need to thoroughly

2 investigate for a variety of toxic materials  
3 including asbestos, lead, and PCBs. This is  
4 particularly important since the project is a flood  
5 zone and will include a school.

6 Building Astoria Cove will generate  
7 hundreds of construction jobs, and permanent  
8 maintenance and retail jobs. Alma has an opportunity  
9 to create good, safe jobs with priority for hiring  
10 from local residents and opportunities for local  
11 business. This is very important to Astoria  
12 residents. For example, we've been in discussions  
13 with Bishop Trailer about ensuring community members  
14 can have good jobs and security at Astoria Cove.

15 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay, I've got to  
16 ask you to wrap it up because of time.

17 JOHN TRENT: Okay, fine. I--

18 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: [interposing] You're  
19 the first one. If I do this on the first one, I'll  
20 have to do it for everyone. Let me move onto the  
21 next people, and then you'll get a chance, you know,  
22 maybe we can add it.

23 JOHN TRENT: If I could just read one  
24 more paragraph to summarize.

2 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: No, that one  
3 paragraph is a little over the limit. So if I vary  
4 on the first one, I can't get going over the thing.  
5 So who wants to go next? Okay.

6 MARLON ESCODO: Good afternoon. My name  
7 is Marlon Escodo. I'm a long-time Astoria resident.  
8 I'm also a member of 32BJ. I'm speaking on behalf of  
9 Joseph Caba. My name is Joseph Caba. I am an Alma  
10 maintenance employee at Shorefront Parkway in the  
11 Rockaways, and a member of SEIU Local 32BJ. I would  
12 like to tell you the truth about the kind of employer  
13 that Alma is. Alma has not respected me and my co-  
14 workers decision to be represented by 32BJ.  
15 Recently, Alma management threatened some of us at  
16 Shorefront Parkway that if we didn't sign a petition  
17 claiming that we no longer wanted our own union. But  
18 we do want our own union. Alma doesn't want our  
19 union.

20 My co-workers and I have been without a  
21 union contract for four years. All we want is Alma  
22 to agree to the same decent pay, health insurance and  
23 pensions as other building service workers in New  
24 York City. Unfortunately, Alma does not think we  
25 deserve union wages and benefits. Alma is not only



2 refusing to provide good jobs for us, but the  
3 National Labor Relations Board is taking them to  
4 trial for not protecting our rights as workers. I  
5 urge you to reject Astoria Cove until Alma Realty  
6 makes a real commitment to good jobs with decent  
7 wages, healthcare, retirement benefits, and respect  
8 for workers' rights. Thank you very much.

9 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, and thank  
10 you for being under the time limit. Ms. Espinal, do  
11 you want to go next?

12 MARIA ESPINAL: Yes, I will go next. My  
13 name is Maria Espinal. I also represent-- I am a  
14 representative of Build Up NYC. I'm a construction  
15 worker in New York City. You know, I have a written  
16 testimony, and I may go off script a little bit.  
17 Hopefully, I can do this within two minutes.

18 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Terrific and you can  
19 submit that written testimony--

20 MARIA ESPINAL: [interposing] It's been  
21 submitted already.

22 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: --and try to keep  
23 your spoken remarks to two minutes--

24 MARIA ESPINAL: [interposing] Right.  
25 It's been submitted already.

2 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: --minus the five  
3 seconds I just spoke.

4 MARIA ESPINAL: I'd like to reiterate. A  
5 lot of what I was going to speak of was already spoke  
6 about with different council members. And I was  
7 really happy to hear that, that a lot of it is being  
8 heard. Alma's track record, and it seems pretty  
9 clear in the testimony that we're getting today, is  
10 not one that can be trusted to do the right thing  
11 just on their spoken word. And it seems pretty clear  
12 to me, and hopefully it seems pretty clear to the  
13 council members that we need assurances from Alma and  
14 we can't just take them on their word. They have  
15 give to certain workers within their facilities a  
16 heard time when it comes to them representing  
17 themselves and asking for prevailing wage. They have  
18 practices, as you know, of hiring contractors who  
19 have set up egregious practices of paying-- Racially  
20 discriminating and paying different workers based on  
21 their race. To me, that's horrific. So I'm glad to  
22 hear that that testimony has already been put in  
23 there, and I already also have that written  
24 testimony. I would also like to reiterate, too, that  
25 there's been a lot of track record with Alma that

2 several of their contractors have been fined by OSHA,  
3 very big fines. And I'll just talk a little bit  
4 about that, if I can.

5 Alma has used contractors that do not  
6 participate in State approved training and  
7 apprenticeship programs. In December 2012, Alma  
8 Realty and Adonai [sp?] Contracting and Supplies  
9 Corp. were issued willful citations by OSHA. OSHA  
10 proposed a total of \$465,000 in penalties against  
11 Adonai and its subcontractors for electrocutions and  
12 such hazards. My main point that I really would like  
13 to say is that a huge track record that we can point  
14 out to as to how Alma has done business in New York  
15 City, and I think that we need to hold them  
16 accountable to that. And also ask for reassurances.  
17 We can't just take them on their word. Thank you  
18 very much.

19 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Ms.  
20 Espinal. Fernando.

21 FERNANDO MONDANO: Good morning. My name  
22 is Fernando Mondano [sp?]. I'm here representing  
23 Local 12 Heat and Frost Insulators and Build Up NYC.  
24 I would like to discuss the points of affordable  
25 housing in Astoria Cove. We need Alma Realty to be a

1 responsible landlord. Unfortunately, Alma and its  
2 affiliates' behavior as landlords across the city's  
3 real estate is a cause for concern. Just last week  
4 1114 Ward Avenue, LLC, a company headed by Alma CEO  
5 Steve Valiotis was deemed as the City's worst  
6 landlord by Public Advocate Letitia James. Other  
7 LLCs headed by Mr. Valiotis have previously been  
8 pasted on a list of Public Advocate Advisor 2013. By  
9 June 2013, there have been over 1,200 open violations  
10 issued by HPD in properties throughout NYC, owned  
11 domains by Alma affiliate entity. More than 250 of  
12 these violations are Class C immediately hazardous  
13 violations, the most serious violations. Many of  
14 these violations concern health and safety of young  
15 children, including lead-based paint, and missing or  
16 defective window guards in apartments with young  
17 children.

18  
19 Furthermore, since 2010, Alma affiliate  
20 entities and Alma affiliate construction companies  
21 like Adonai Construction and Supplies Corporation  
22 have been issued nearly 50 NYC DOB violations at  
23 properties across the city for failing to maintain  
24 elevators. Alma also needs to make a commitment to  
25 make real affordable housing at Astoria Cove. Both

2 the Community Board and Borough President voted  
3 against this project partly because 20% affordable  
4 housing is insufficient. We agree with the Community  
5 Board, and the Borough President. Elected officials  
6 have informed us that tenants are estimating that  
7 roughly 700 units will be converted to market rate.  
8 This is approximately doubling their the rent on  
9 affordable units Alma intends to build up Astoria  
10 Cove. If these conversions occur, they would  
11 represent a net decrease in the company's affordable  
12 housing in NYC. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you. [bell]  
14 Nice. Do any members of the panel have a question  
15 for this group? Costa Constantinides? Mr. Miller?  
16 No. Okay. Well, thank you very much. We are going  
17 to now move onto a panel in support of the project.  
18 I'd like to call up Jack Friedman from the Queens  
19 Chamber of Commerce; Abdula Wilson; Almeda Rodney;  
20 and Bishop Mitchell Taylor, if he's still here. Is  
21 everyone--? Yes. Okay. We've got four. One, two,  
22 three, four. Okay.

23 [background discussion]

24 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Yes. Bishop Taylor,  
25 we won't count the time on video against your time.

2 [Pause]

3 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Before you start, I  
4 want to just acknowledge we've been joined by Council  
5 Member Donovan Richards who is now going to cast a  
6 vote on the Land Use item cafe that we heard before.  
7 Will counsel please call Mr. Richards' name.

8 CLERK: Council Member Richards on LU  
9 122.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: I vote aye.

11 CLERK: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay, that was easy.  
13 Whenever you're ready. Bishop, are you going to  
14 start? Who is starting? You guys can decide.  
15 Ladies first. Okay.

16 BISHOP TAYLOR: We're going to let the  
17 lady go first especially since we're on video.

18 ALMEDA RODNEY: Thank you. Good  
19 afternoon. My name is Almeda Rodney. I've lived in  
20 Astoria for 45 years. I am here to read the  
21 testimony of NYCHA Astoria House Resident Association  
22 President, Claudia Coger, who could not be here  
23 today. I have called Astoria Houses my home for the  
24 past 60 years. I am here today to support some very  
25 promising enhancements proposed for my community.

1 Astoria Houses is tucked away in an isolated  
2 peninsula that is under developed and for a long time  
3 has been overlooked. It is home for 3,000 public  
4 housing residents with an average annual income of  
5 approximately \$27,000. That said, we live in a  
6 beautiful neighborhood, but are unable to fully take  
7 advantage of its beauty for reasons I will detail.  
8 Portions of the Astoria Hallet's Point Waterfront are  
9 currently blocked out from our neighborhood by  
10 battered buildings that remain far beyond their own  
11 industrial uses.  
12

13           A walk around our neighborhood  
14 illustrates the decline of our retail corridors where  
15 liquor stores, check cashers, and where beggars  
16 dominate. These stores have short life cycles making  
17 it challenging for residents to find steady  
18 employment, healthy affordable family meals and more.  
19 As an MTA two-fare zone, getting basic necessities  
20 such as groceries requires a bus or taxi ride. That  
21 is a negative we seek to correct. I want residents  
22 of this community to have access to basic amenities  
23 within walking distance of their homes just like my  
24 family and I had when we first moved into this area.  
25 The Astoria Cove Developers, 2030 Astoria Developers

2 has pledged to address the needs and request of  
3 Astoria Houses residents and the rest of the  
4 communities. These needs include job training,  
5 skilled labor and union jobs. It is also important  
6 for our residents not only to be employed in the  
7 development but also have the opportunity to be an  
8 owner with the creation of corporate business.

9 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: I was waiting for a  
10 period. I have to cut you off. But do you want to  
11 do just one more line. You got one more thing to  
12 say?

13 ALMEDA RODNEY: One line.

14 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay, that's fine.

15 ALMEDA RODNEY: On behalf of myself and  
16 the Astoria Houses Residents Association we support  
17 Astoria Cove and anxious for it to move forward.

18 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you. I  
19 apologize but thank you. Who's next.

20 JACK FRIEDMAN: I am.

21 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay. Make sure to  
22 go on the other microphone, Mr. Friedman.

23 JACK FRIEDMAN: Sorry about that. Thank  
24 you, Chair Weprin, Council Members Greenfield,  
25 Council Member Miller and Councilman Martinez. [sic]



1 My name is Jack Friedman. I'm the Executive Director  
2 of the Queens Chamber of Commerce. I thank you again  
3 for letting me testify today. In the diverse and  
4 growing population, our transportation system is  
5 working hard to meet the needs of everyday New  
6 Yorkers. The Queens Chamber of Commerce believes  
7 the proposed Astoria Cove development will help  
8 future residents of Astoria and Western Queens to  
9 live a much higher quality of life, and add to  
10 Queens' burgeoning economy. The specific project  
11 enhances this corner of our borough by importantly  
12 adding a mixed-use development inclusive of housing,  
13 retail and open space in an area that is sorely  
14 undeveloped with proposed 456 [sic] School K through  
15 5. And a new pedestrian thoroughfare along the  
16 waterfront that includes green spaces, water access  
17 for recreation for families to enjoy.

18  
19 Not just speaking for the many advantages  
20 to Astoria, but most importantly to the Queens  
21 Chamber is this plan also helps bring quality jobs to  
22 Western Queens now and long into the future. With  
23 the many construction jobs with this project come.  
24 Astoria Cove will add some 110,000 square feet of  
25 retail space, a supermarket, a corner of accounting

1 that is sorely lacking in such vital retail  
2 amenities.

3  
4           The neighborhood, its inhabitants and  
5 future workforce look forward to services ranging  
6 from local family restaurants, a hardware store, a  
7 dry cleaner and employment opportunities come with  
8 these new retail businesses. An increase in people  
9 who travel now to that area. There are many great  
10 restaurants already Astoria, the best in the city.  
11 It could also be enhanced to see an overall boost in  
12 business, thus even more job creation.

13           As part of the infrastructure  
14 enhancement, there will be parks in the complex  
15 helping with neighborhood flooding [sic], a 900-space  
16 garage for local residents including retail shoppers.  
17 Without Astoria Cove none of these improvements are  
18 even being looked at. One larger challenge with the  
19 development was transportation accessibility because  
20 of the subway being quite a bit way. So we are very  
21 pleased and the Chamber is pleased that the developer  
22 is now including a plan to seek to incorporate the  
23 additional ferry terminal. The City needs to support  
24 that type of ferry and assist with this road and  
25 operate the terminals. The Chamber believes the

2 project is and will be a great addition for Astoria.

3 We wholeheartedly endorse and support the project

4 that will advance and represent the Astoria community

5 for generations to come. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Mr.

7 Friedman. Yes, sir.

8 ABDULA WILSON: My name is Abdula Wilson.

9 I'm here today speaking on behalf of those who I

10 believe will be most affected by such a project as

11 this. I personally have known the developer for over

12 25 years. I've watched him through both the good

13 times and the bad times. I can remember how bad and

14 dangerous this site was. There was a time when he

15 and his young son were robbed a gun point. In 1988,

16 when he first came to 26th Avenue, one of the first

17 things I remember him doing was hiring myself and

18 others to clean up his properties. I recall there

19 being a textile warehouse that produced clothing

20 before we had a bus stop or on 27th Avenue. The area

21 wasn't-- Excuse me. The area wasn't what it is

22 today. He provided security and also hired from the

23 local area. With the textile company-- When the

24 textile company failed, he bought a distributing

25 company along with yet more jobs for the area.

2 Again, when that didn't work, I remember him  
3 partnering up with the bus company, which employs  
4 about 30% of his workforce from the company. I've  
5 been told that when this project is approved it will  
6 not only bring about good jobs, more jobs, better  
7 jobs, but it will bring low-income housing for those  
8 that need it most here in Astoria. We look forward  
9 to this project going through. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Mr.  
11 Wilson. We appreciate it. Mr. Taylor.

12 BISHOP TAYLOR: To the Committee and to  
13 the Chair Council Member Weprin and my Council Member  
14 Costa and Donovan Richards and Daneek, and all those  
15 that are not here, I'm not going to read my  
16 testimony. But I'm going to say that I've been an  
17 advocate for residents of public housing for the last  
18 30 years. My dad started in Queensbridge in 1961,  
19 and our family has been dedicated to breaking cycles  
20 of poverty in public housing neighborhoods. We have  
21 since established the East River Development  
22 Alliance, which is now opened up there. It has three  
23 campuses in Queens. One in Queensbridge, one in  
24 Astoria Houses with 16 full-time employees and one in  
25 Far Rockaway. Our total and entire mission is to

2 break cycles of poverty in public housing  
3 neighborhoods, and give residents the tools and  
4 resources they need for economic mobility and self-  
5 sufficiency.

6 My collaboration with Mrs. Coger and with  
7 the developer that is at question, Astoria 2030, has  
8 been one that I have advocated on behalf of residents  
9 in Astoria Houses for, number one, access to  
10 affordable housing. Number two, apprentice slots so  
11 they can get good union jobs, and then jobs after the  
12 project. Permanent jobs in this space. And then, of  
13 course, historically when a development like this  
14 happens in urban tracks, thousands of retail space is  
15 developed. People come in from outside the community  
16 and occupy those stores, and sell to our community.  
17 But the community itself has no part in the wealth.  
18 We don't just want the jobs, we want to own the  
19 businesses that the retail space is going to offer.  
20 We don't just want low paying jobs, we want good  
21 union jobs. I've met with members of 32BJ, and I am  
22 in consort with them that union jobs are the path in  
23 the way to the middle-class and it has been since I  
24 was 18 years old. I am a union member, and member of

2 Glaziers Local 1087, and I have always been a  
3 proponent for the unions.

4 I think that this development is trying  
5 to do the right thing. I think that we're painting  
6 him with a brush of other activities that happened  
7 under another organization, and we're trying to use  
8 that as leverage to discredit him on this project.  
9 I've talked to Costa, who is a great leader in our  
10 community, and I agree with him on the AMIs, and on  
11 the affordability context. I think the devil is in  
12 the details, but overall, this is a project that as  
13 the tide rises, all small ships will ride together,  
14 rise together--

15 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Let me cut you off  
16 for a second, and then I'll ask you a question also.  
17 Bishop Taylor, I mean you've been involved in  
18 developments in other parts of the city, too. What  
19 makes you feel confident that this developer will  
20 give those jobs to those local Astoria Houses  
21 residents and other residents of the area. And give  
22 the opportunity of owning those businesses? What  
23 conversations have you had with him that are  
24 assurances that have been given?

2           BISHOP TAYLOR: Right. That's a very  
3 good question. I've had experiences with developers  
4 that looked me right in the face and said we're going  
5 to do X, Y, and Z, and as soon as they go through  
6 ULURP and get what they want, they say good-bye, see  
7 you later. I never said that. This developer has  
8 put things in writing. We have MOUs and letters of  
9 intent and understanding between Astoria Houses  
10 Residents Association, Between Urban Upbound who has  
11 the number one Jobs Plus site in the city right now  
12 in Astoria Houses. And saying that we're going to be  
13 the ones to be able to outreach and send credible  
14 candidates for these jobs. I've seen documentation  
15 that is gone to the union that said that Astoria  
16 residents must be prioritized for the jobs in the  
17 project. I even learned that the union didn't want  
18 that language in the documentation. I couldn't  
19 understand why, and I spoke to my council member  
20 about this to get some help to find out why the 3,000  
21 residents that live in Astoria Houses would not be a  
22 priority if a project is right across the street.

23           So my point is this. I think I have a  
24 pretty good judge of character. My watch word in  
25 Costa knows this, Everything stinks until you put it

2 in ink. And, that's been my collaboration with this  
3 particular developer, and I'm anxious, and I've been  
4 working with my council member, Council Member Costa,  
5 to make sure that we can memorialize this. Use the  
6 tools and the resources that he has to hold the  
7 developers to their commitments to our community.  
8 That's the only assurances that I have, the only  
9 teeth that I have by working with the local electives  
10 and getting things in writing from the developer.  
11 And the main thing is ownership here. We're going to  
12 own the supermarket. We're going to own stores on  
13 that peninsula. So, you know, and I'm glad this is  
14 on video because I'm very famous on video now. But  
15 yeah, this is real development, real opportunity for  
16 people that have been disenfranchised for a long  
17 time.

18 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: All right. I  
19 appreciate the opinion. Any comments or questions of  
20 the panel? No. Thank you very much. I appreciate  
21 it. Now we go back to a panel in opposition. Okay.  
22 We'll take this. I'd like to call, yeah, call up  
23 Charlene is it Obernauer or something like that.  
24 Justin Wood. Sorry about that. Karen Nevers, and  
25 Maritza Silva-Farrell. Do I have four people?



2 [background discussion]

3 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Are all four of you  
4 here? Yeah. One, two, three, four. We have five.  
5 Oh, okay, four. Okay. Whenever you're ready. You  
6 can decide who goes first.

7 [Pause]

8 KAREN NEVERS: Okay, my name is Karen  
9 Nevers [sp?] and I am a tenant under Alma management.  
10 I'm here today to put into place a reality check. I  
11 represent the people that occupy 750 apartments  
12 located at Surfside on Shorefront Parkway in  
13 Rockaway, Queens under Alma management. Since 2009,  
14 our tenant association has created a paper trail with  
15 Alma and with the DHCR. The following issues  
16 continue to be problematic, and force tenants to call  
17 311 on a regular basis due to a poor response under  
18 Alma Management:

19 Heat, hot water, brown water. Scheduled  
20 cleaning of hallways and stairwells in incinerator  
21 rooms typically stop. We don't have cleaning  
22 supplies to do that. Decrease in service, taking  
23 away laundry rooms to make space to rent for  
24 commercial businesses. Broken and dirty machines in  
25 the laundry rooms. \$2.75 per load. Bugs and vermin

1 in common areas and in apartments. Broken locks to  
2 enter our buildings and the gates that surround the  
3 perimeters of where we live. Disrepaired or broken  
4 elevators are a very common occurrence. No  
5 inspection cards in our elevators. 911 calls have  
6 now been placed to help tenants who have been trapped  
7 on numerous occasions. We are investigating that and  
8 getting the paperwork. Are these things ever really  
9 repaired? Lights out in the parking lot. Lights to  
10 the doorways that enter our building are often out.  
11 Generally building wide issues like leaks, cracks in  
12 the terraces and the brickwork.

14 Subpar work in the past has caused us to  
15 pay for MCIs currently. The Tenants Association is  
16 in the process of hiring an independent engineer.  
17 Elected officials are on our side with HPD to come  
18 down and do an inspection. Why are these people  
19 allowed to do further building when they did into  
20 their own pockets, and cannot even take care of the  
21 property of a rent stabilized building where we live.  
22 We are tired of it. We are tired of the fight, but  
23 as long as we are living there, we're fighting the  
24 fight.

2 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Good. Good spot to  
3 end. Right there.

4 KAREN NEVERS: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Next. Who's next?

6 JUSTIN WOOD: Sure. Hello. Thank you  
7 Chair Weprin and members of the subcommittee, and the  
8 Council. My name is Justin Wood. I'm a community  
9 organizer in the Environmental Justice Program at New  
10 York Lawyers for the Public Interest NYLPI. And  
11 thanks for this opportunity to give some testimony  
12 today. We have significant environmental and public  
13 health concerns about potential contamination at the  
14 Astoria Cove site that was raised in the Draft  
15 Environmental Impact Statement that we saw earlier  
16 this year. And thanks to Build Up NYC for bringing  
17 these issues to our attention. I think we've heard a  
18 lot about concerns with transparency and other  
19 commitments made by this developer on everything from  
20 affordable housing to broken promises with existing  
21 housing. Similarly, we have concerns that to date as  
22 far as the public knows, only phase 1 testing and  
23 preliminary testing has been done on the proposed  
24 site. And a number of contaminants including PCBs

2 and manufacturing contaminants and asbestos have been  
3 found in these sites.

4           The fact that a school is proposed for  
5 the site raises particular concerns because children  
6 are particularly susceptible to toxins such as PCBs.  
7 So we would propose and we would urge you to require  
8 that phase 2 soil and groundwater and other more  
9 thorough testing be done on these sites. And that  
10 the Council has ample time to thoroughly evaluate and  
11 digest the results of those tests, and that the  
12 public be given the same transparency. And that we  
13 be able to submit those results to independent  
14 scientists prior to any vote on this development.  
15 Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify.

16           CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Mr. Wood.

17           [Pause]

18           CHARLENE OBERNAUER: Hi. My name is  
19 Charlene Obernauer. I'm the Executive Director of  
20 NYCOSH, the New York Committee for Occupational  
21 Safety and Health. I appreciate this opportunity to  
22 testify today regarding Alma Realty's proposed  
23 Astoria Cove development. We're pleased to join with  
24 our friends in Labor and community organizations in  
25 the efforts to secure responsible development,

1 affordable housing, a healthy environment, and good  
2 jobs for New Yorkers. The testimony that I'm going  
3 to read is going to primarily address environmental  
4 and occupational and health concerns with the  
5 proposed project. It would be a bit longer, but  
6 Justin said most of what I need to say. So I'll  
7 second him, and we're recommending that the Council  
8 vote no on the Astoria Cove project due to Alma's  
9 record as an irresponsible developer and employer.  
10

11 First, I'm going to speak about safety.  
12 Alma Realty has a track record of endangering  
13 workers. In June of 2013, OSHA assessed initial  
14 penalties totaling almost \$500,000 or to be specific,  
15 \$465,000 against Alma and its subcontractors for  
16 willful, serious, and repeat workplace safety  
17 violation. Now, just to clarify, a willful violation  
18 is one committed with intentional knowing or  
19 voluntary disregard for the law's requirements or  
20 with plain indifference to workers' safety and  
21 health. So this is somebody that knows what the law  
22 is and then violates the law.

23 Per the New York City Department of  
24 Buildings, Alma Realty has a history of 89  
25 complaints, 132 DOB violations and 99 Environmental

2 Control Board violations at two high-rise residential  
3 properties in Queens. Ooh, that went fast. At the  
4 end of the day, non-union projects are more dangers  
5 than union projects. In 2012, nearly 80% of  
6 workplace fatalities in construction were on non-  
7 union job sites.

8           So again, the New York City Council  
9 should consider the developer's record of labor law  
10 and other violations and practices including those  
11 involving occupational safety and health as a factor  
12 in awarding, overseeing, and defining contracts or  
13 permits. The City Council should not grant project  
14 approval unless these conditions are met. And due to  
15 Alma Realty's reputation, NYCOSH recommends that the  
16 City Council vote against the Astoria Cove Project.  
17 Thank you.

18           CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you. Next  
19 please.

20           MARITZA SILVA-FARRELL: Good afternoon.  
21 We are persons who were early this morning. Well,  
22 thank you for giving the opportunity today to comment  
23 on the proposed Zoning Amendment at Astoria Cove. My  
24 name is Maritza Silva Farrell. I am a Lead Political  
25 Organizer at ALIGN, the Alliance for Greater New

1 York. Alliance is a community labor coalition  
2 dedicated to creating good jobs, vibrant communities,  
3 and accountable [sic] democracy for all New Yorkers.  
4 We believe that the key to successful development is  
5 ensuring that the values of the neighborhood and its  
6 members are upheld despite the changes that come from  
7 large-scale projects. We believe that Astoria Cove  
8 could be an opportunity to transform the community,  
9 but only if it's built to the highest standards.

11 In recent months, the Community Board  
12 representing Astoria residents and the Queens Borough  
13 President voted down the project, as we heard today.  
14 Council Member Constantinides has also consistently  
15 raised serious concerns about the current proposal,  
16 as we heard today. The City Planning Commission has  
17 ignored these voices of dissent, and recently voted  
18 to approve the current proposal for Astoria Cove. We  
19 urge the City Council to use their power within the  
20 ULURP process to disapprove this application unless  
21 labor standards and affordable housing issues are  
22 addressed.

23 There is a direct connection between the  
24 rezoning of land for large-scale developments and the  
25 socio-economic impact on the community and workers of

2 Queens. There need to be labor standards for  
3 construction as well as permanent jobs. We recommend  
4 that in order for these developments to be approved,  
5 the Developer Alma Realty should make a real  
6 commitment to creating good jobs for construction,  
7 permanent maintenance, and retail. It is  
8 particularly important if the development will be  
9 apply for subsidies through the Fresh Program, and  
10 also if the development is receiving 15 to 25 years  
11 of no taxes. Subsidies should not be given without  
12 labor standards that will guarantee high retail for  
13 the site.

14 Just to conclude, I would just like to  
15 say that we want to make sure that also affordable  
16 housing is addressed. We would like to make sure  
17 that 50% of affordable housing will be part of the  
18 development. Everybody agrees that this is the best  
19 way to go, and also that \$2,700 for an apartment is  
20 really not affordable.

21 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay.

22 MARITZA SILVA-FARRELL: And just to  
23 finish up, also I do have about eight members of the  
24 clergy in Astoria have shared some testimony and I  
25 would like to give it to the Council.



2 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay. We'll have  
3 the Sergeant-at-Arms take that.

4 MARITZA SILVA-FARRELL: And I am very  
5 happy to attend today. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you very much.  
7 Go look at your applause [sic] and thank you very  
8 much to this panel. We're going to now move onto a  
9 panel in favor of the project. Richard Khuzami,  
10 Michael Ferguson, the Reverend Dwayne Jackson, and  
11 Reverend Bobby Moore. Is that four here? I think we  
12 have four people, right? Councilman Donovan Richards  
13 is going to chair for a few minutes while I just take  
14 a break, and I'll be right back. Thank you, Council  
15 Member Richards.

16 [Pause]

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: All right, you  
18 can start. Thank you.

19 Good afternoon, gentlemen, and thank you  
20 for this opportunity to come before you and to  
21 address you. My name is the Reverend Dwayne Jackson,  
22 Pastor of the First Reformed Church of Astoria in  
23 Astoria, Queens. And I've served the community now  
24 for nearly 20 years. The First Reformed Church,  
25 which has been there for 179 years is a community

1 church that reaches out, which services the youth,  
2 senior programs and others. We work closely with the  
3 seniors also in Astoria Houses. My church is located  
4 on 2726 12th Street in Astoria close to the proposed  
5 development site.  
6

7 My parishioners and our neighbors are all  
8 living right in the Astoria Houses, and we are  
9 thrilled about the developers taking the time to talk  
10 to the people of this community, and take our needs  
11 seriously. Many times businesses, groups have come  
12 into our peninsula without even asking our opinion.  
13 With the Astoria Cove project, this has not been the  
14 case. The developers have communicated effectively  
15 with Astoria Houses and Hallet's Cove residents about  
16 the future enhancements they envision our community,  
17 our neighborhood has been doing for quite a while  
18 now. We've been giving presentations, meetings,  
19 tours, and the developers have generally valued and  
20 sought our input. Together we are painting a future  
21 for our neighborhoods and our Council people. This  
22 painting is inspiring to all of us. This painting  
23 articulates a vision of one for our peninsula. It  
24 hopes that it will open up local streets, jobs and  
25

1 job opportunities as our community looks to move  
2 forward together.

3  
4 In conclusion, it is our hope that our  
5 community will continue to grow, that job  
6 opportunities will become available and that all of  
7 the issues that were brought up will be addressed.  
8 Thank you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: Thank you.

10 REVEREND BOBBY MOORE: Thank you to the  
11 acting chair and the Council panel. God bless you on  
12 today. My name is Bobby Moore, Overseer of the  
13 Astoria Baptist Church and Vice Chair of the Long  
14 Island City Astoria Clergy Coalition. I've been  
15 serving the Astoria community in a variety of ways  
16 for 15 years. My church is located at 3117 21st  
17 Street in Long Island City. The Astoria Cove project  
18 will breathe new life and vitality into the property  
19 of Astoria with the addition of 1,723 units, 345 of  
20 which are affordable. I am glad that the developers  
21 want Astoria Houses residents to have priority in  
22 occupying these new affordable housing units. I  
23 support the project because of this: Providing a  
24 portion of priority affordable housing for Astoria  
25 Houses residents will enable upward mobility for

1 interested and qualified and qualify while freeing up  
2 additional much needed NYCHA housing for those on the  
3 waiting list. Too often, I have heard of other  
4 housing lotteries where residents who are getting  
5 subsidized housing like NYCHA housing are actually  
6 excluded from qualifying for the lottery. These  
7 policies have been historically perpetuating  
8 segregation and isolation in our neighborhoods. I am  
9 thrilled to hear that builders and our Council  
10 members are committed to figuring out a way to create  
11 opportunities for Astoria Housing residents as  
12 opposed to limiting those opportunities. I have  
13 often heard of cases where families will win  
14 affordable housing lotteries only to find out that  
15 they are no longer eligible because of their credit  
16 scores of lack thereof. I am impressed by the  
17 commitment of this building and future landlords to  
18 determine other ways that strong potential tenants  
19 might qualify for the new housing. Astoria Cove will  
20 now have no poor doors, or discriminate between  
21 tenants who pay more and the ones who pay less. The  
22 bidding committee to making sure that there are no  
23 two classes of citizen tenants. One who gets great  
24 amenities, and the other one who gets less. Instead,

2 tenants will have equitable amenities. Astoria Cove  
3 development has been years in the making. A solution  
4 to the many issues were born from research and  
5 ongoing public conversation with local communities.  
6 Astoria Cove will and is a solid community housing  
7 model that deserves approval. Thank you.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: Thank you.

9 MICHAEL FERGUSON: Good afternoon. My  
10 name is Michael Ferguson. I'll be reading a  
11 statement on behalf of Arthur Rosenfield, President  
12 of the Long Island City/Astoria Chamber of Commerce.

13 Members of the Council: I am Arthur  
14 Rosenfield. I run a local news service and have long  
15 been active in the activities across my community of  
16 Long Island City and the Astoria Community. I also  
17 serve as President of the Long Island City/Astoria  
18 Chamber of Commerce, an organization that I founded.  
19 I have the good fortune of being part of the  
20 renaissance of LIC and the evolving gentrification of  
21 Astoria.

22 I am here to both recommend and  
23 enthusiastically support the Astoria Cove Development  
24 Proposal before you.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: Could you just  
3 speak into the mic a little bit more.

4 MICHAEL FERGUSON: Okay.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: Okay, thank  
6 you.

7 MICHAEL FERGUSON: For 50 years, no one  
8 has made an investment in this isolate part of the  
9 peninsula until now. 2030 Astoria Developers has  
10 proposed to develop and bring positivity,  
11 prosperity, and life to it. It will contribute  
12 unique infrastructure so that the Western Astoria  
13 area and neighborhood can truly flourish. At this  
14 time the area west of 21st Street has limited  
15 development. This is in contrast to the community  
16 development and prosperity in Astoria that has taken  
17 place east of 21st Street. 2030 Astoria Developers  
18 has come to the table with a great vision. This  
19 community will certainly enjoy the benefits this  
20 project will add including the creation of new well  
21 paying jobs and the attraction of local investment  
22 It will also serve to encourage the development of  
23 public transportation for a neighborhood, which is  
24 underserved.

2 Together, with other previously  
3 authorized development on the peninsula the entire  
4 area will be a model of residential development that  
5 will lift the quality of life in that neighborhood of  
6 Astoria for everyone including the residents of  
7 Astoria Houses simply by its proximity. Because of  
8 my activity, I see how that vision finds its way into  
9 the lives of people across our community. This  
10 development partnership, 2030 Astoria Developers  
11 impresses me that they have loyalty to the community,  
12 and they have demonstrated a desire to be a good  
13 corporate citizen and long-term partner investor in  
14 our collective future. They are bringing jobs,  
15 training and so much more. Respectfully, Arthur  
16 Rosenfield. Thank you.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: Thank you.

18 RICHARD KHUZAMI: Members of the  
19 Committee of the City Council, I'm Richard Khuzami.  
20 I'm President of the old Astoria Neighborhood  
21 Association. I'm also a member of CB1. I'm speaking  
22 tonight with my Old Astoria neighborhood hat. The  
23 Old Astoria Neighborhood Association is a civic group  
24 consisting of residents, property owners and business  
25 owners in Old Astoria. This includes Hallet's Point

2 and areas between 21st Street and the East River.  
3 Many of our members regret not being here, but as  
4 small business and working-class people, they are not  
5 afforded the luxury of taking time off. So I am  
6 speaking on behalf of this group.

7           On November 3rd, we're going to have a  
8 meeting where we discuss our final position on the  
9 New York City Planning Commission's findings. But  
10 previously especially because of the superior  
11 architectural design elements, the Old Astoria  
12 Neighborhood Association is in favor of this  
13 development, as long as certain modifications and  
14 conditions are addressed. We're in favor first of  
15 all of a holistic approach to the development of  
16 Hallet's Point, including all developers, City  
17 agencies, any others, non-profits to make this what  
18 it can be, one of the garden areas of New York City.  
19 But the following issues need to be prioritized and  
20 dealt with on a proactive basis.

21           Number one, security. Hallet's  
22 Peninsula, the majority of the gun violence in the  
23 114 Precinct has happened down there, and it has to  
24 be addressed. Secondly, traffic, transportation, and  
25 parking. And third, infrastructure. Also on



2 affordable housing. Our position on affordable  
3 housing is evolving giving the City Planning  
4 Commission's endorsement of the 20% requirement. Of  
5 the members who have been polled so far, about 75% of  
6 them are agreeing with the Planning Commission's  
7 findings. I think this is primarily because  
8 affordable units should not be increased at the  
9 expense of funding of other topical issues.

10 Another issue that comes to mind is the  
11 establishment of a dog run and comfort station within  
12 the open areas. This is extremely important, and  
13 it's good for the developer and it's good for the  
14 community, especially a dog run. And security. I'd  
15 like to go a little further into that except that I  
16 have no time. Okay.

17 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you all very  
18 much.

19 [Pause]

20 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: All right, thank you  
21 very much. Now the next panel in opposition-- I  
22 need my glasses so I don't mess up the names. Audrey  
23 Sasson, Maria Espinal, Robert Lopez, and Joseph Caba.  
24 How many of those are here? I'm going to ask. When  
25

2 I call your name just give me a little like here or  
3 coming--

4 AUDREY SASSON: [interposing] Audrey.

5 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: --because I think we  
6 lost some people. They're all here?

7 AUDREY SASSON: No, no. Maria is not  
8 here.

9 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Oh, Espinal did?  
10 That's the same Espinal. I wasn't sure. Okay. All  
11 right, all right, all right. So give me a--

12 [Pause]

13 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Ms.  
14 Ramos. Leandra Recrania [sp?]. Is she here?

15 LEANDRA RECRANIA: Yes, here.

16 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay, excellent.  
17 Thank you. And how many are missing. Brendon  
18 Sexton. Brendon are you here. There you are. All  
19 right, how many have we got.

20 AUDREY SASSON: [off mic]

21 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: I can't count when  
22 you're blocking me. No. [laughs] One, two, three.  
23 Brandon, are you three? Like I said, these people  
24 I'm calling are all in opposition at the moment.

25 [background discussion]

2 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Bruce Rosen.

3 Representing him. A citizen it says. All right.

4 Mr. Rosen, that's you. Okay, come join us. There is  
5 one chair left, and when the music stops you have to  
6 be sitting. Thank you one person. I appreciate  
7 that. So again, we're going to give you two minutes,  
8 but whenever you're ready and decide who goes first  
9 just make sure to say your name when you start your  
10 testimony.

11 BRUCE ROSEN: Yes, my name is Bruce  
12 Rosen. I guess I'll go directly to the issues. I  
13 grew up in Queens. My grandparents actually lived a  
14 short walk from there in the Ravenswood Houses. I  
15 think there is a terrible obsession with 80/20 in the  
16 absence of other programs at all levels of housing. I  
17 say that because the core element in real estate  
18 appraisal is looking for comparable values. You look  
19 for prices for improved or unimproved property of  
20 similar characteristics for what is built there, for  
21 what the uses are as close as possible. Putting the  
22 emphasis on the 80 is saying that that's the value  
23 you want. So you're creating tremendous  
24 displacement.

25

1           As far as development goes, right after  
2           9/11, there is a forgotten town hall that took place  
3           on Pier 17, over 700 people. What they wanted for  
4           the site of the World Trade Center was affordable  
5           housing. Not the commercial development that we put  
6           there with huge subsidies. And, of course, the  
7           schools and local shopping, and cultural  
8           institutions. It was the one interjection by City  
9           Planning to put in streets, and the Mayor [sic]  
10          pulled out of that. The project was presented as  
11          some new thing. We never had such open space and the  
12          like. Well, Queens was to the 20th Century, and in  
13          some way continues to be the national-- I can't  
14          think of the right work. It's the model for  
15          planning. From the teens through the '70s and even  
16          with the elements that are done in our world now.  
17          For the Garden City movement and terrorism in the  
18          parks, one after another. So we're introducing  
19          nothing. And it has-- this is something that was  
20          done before. We created new zoning with special  
21          planned communities, which we never designated any  
22          more. The places like Park Chester or Fresh Meadows  
23          in Riverton are the types of models. This is not  
24          new. Lastly, I'd like to say that we have used--  
25

2 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: [interposing] Please  
3 wrap up. [sic]

4 BRUCE ROSEN: --we've used the zoning as  
5 a tool for affordability in Special Clinton District.  
6 It was used only once. It was used only once and I  
7 suggest that you folks revisit that. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you very much.  
9 Next please.

10 AUDREY SASSON: Good afternoon. Thank  
11 you so much for giving me the opportunity today to  
12 provide testimony on Astoria Cove. My name is Audrey  
13 Sasson. I'm the Director of Walmart-Free NYC.  
14 Walmart-Free NYC is a large and diverse citywide  
15 coalition committed to increasing economic  
16 opportunities, good jobs, and vibrant businesses in  
17 the neighborhoods across the five boroughs as well as  
18 preventing the Walmartization of New York City.  
19 We've been thrilled to work in partnership with many  
20 of you in our efforts through the years, and we  
21 appreciate the support that many of you on the  
22 Council have demonstrated.

23 As you may know, Walmart has announced  
24 plans to open up small format stores in urban centers  
25 across the country and has its eyes set on New York

1 City. The square footage designated for a grocery  
2 store at Astoria Cove matches the square footage  
3 typically assigned to Walmart's grocery model, known  
4 as a neighborhood market. But as many of you know,  
5 Walmart, the largest private employer in the world,  
6 has created a race to the bottom resulting in lower  
7 wages, fewer benefits and less security for millions  
8 of workers across our country. Not just at Walmart  
9 stores, but nationwide.  
10

11           It is also why hundreds of workers from  
12 low wage sectors across our city came together just  
13 last week to call out Walmart's Low-Road Business  
14 Model in a massive day action that highlighted the  
15 urgency of addressing growing inequality that Walmart  
16 and its business model is driving nationwide.  
17 Walmart-Free New York City believes that the best way  
18 to guard against the negative impact that Walmart  
19 could have in our communities is to forge a path to  
20 high road retail that prioritizes good jobs and  
21 sustainable community development. Which  
22 parenthetically today and important today. In light  
23 of the project in today's discussion also includes  
24 real affordable housing.  
25

2           The City Council has the power to turn  
3 Astoria Cove into a model development for the future  
4 of our city. We are, therefore, here to urge you to  
5 use your power with the ULURP process to require that  
6 the developer of Astoria Cove prioritizes retailers  
7 with a proven track record of paying living wages,  
8 providing good benefits, hiring locally, and  
9 supporting worker organizing. More of that is in our  
10 written testimony, which you have that. [laughs]  
11 Thank you.

12           CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, and I  
13 appreciate that. Next, please.

14           LEANDRA ARCANA: Good afternoon. Thank  
15 you for giving me the opportunity to give my  
16 testimony. My name Leandra Arcana. [sic] I am a  
17 Queens resident. I am a leader of Make the Road New  
18 York. Today, we are all here united under the belief  
19 that all neighborhoods must remain truly affordable  
20 to a family that already lives there. When we look  
21 at Astoria Cove, an affordable rent of \$2,600 rent is  
22 unacceptable. The local Community Board, the Board,  
23 the Borough President and Council Member  
24 Constantinides understands that. Too often, our  
25 working class New Yorkers are left with a bad deal.

2 Rents are skyrocketing out of control. Why are rates  
3 not staying in containment? [sic] Families are  
4 spending 60 and 70 of their income on rent, and when  
5 affordable housing is proposed, it's proposed at  
6 \$2,600. This is outrage. Dear Council Members, do  
7 you know some working families who earns \$2,600  
8 monthly income? We have seen that effect of  
9 gentrification has done to Brooklyn, and we cannot  
10 allow Queens to be the next. Today, we call for  
11 nothing less than 50% real affordability, which we  
12 expect the City and Alma Realty to be the leader.  
13 Thank you so much.

14 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you. Mr.  
15 Sexton.

16 BRENDAN SEXTON: Good afternoon. My name  
17 is Brendan Sexton. I'm the Political Coordinator for  
18 UFCW Local 1500. I'll be speaking on behalf of our  
19 Secretary-Treasurer, Anthony Speelman.

20 Good afternoon. My name is Anthony  
21 Speelman. I'm the Secretary-Treasurer of UFCW Local  
22 1500. Local 1500 is New York's largest grocery  
23 workers union made up of over 23,000 supermarket  
24 workers. We tirelessly fight in our contracts to  
25 ensure our members' livelihoods, keep up with the



2 costly living in New York City. We believe that good  
3 jobs and good food are the building blocks for a  
4 healthy community. Thousands of Local 1500 members  
5 work and/or live in Astoria and the surrounding  
6 communities. And the supermarket slated to be an  
7 anchor in the retail portion of the Astoria Cove  
8 project we are concerned. Our members are worried  
9 that Alma Realty has not committed to creating good  
10 jobs, and affordable housing on scale to match the  
11 community.

12                   Alma Realty has yet to commit to hiring  
13 local residents at prevailing union wages during  
14 construction phase, and hasn't committed to ensure  
15 the creation of good jobs after construction. Having  
16 a strong union supermarket is fundamental to  
17 maintaining and building a strong middle-class in  
18 Astoria.

19                   As many of our members can attest to,  
20 having a dependable job, a union contract, and  
21 affordable housing allows our New York communities to  
22 thrive. The Astoria Cove project is part of a bigger  
23 development group happening in the Outer Boroughs.  
24 Alma Realty has an opportunity to work with the  
25 community groups, labor, and politicians through all

2 of Astoria, and give all Queens residents an  
3 opportunity to prosper, not just the contractors.  
4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you. Before  
6 you leave, first I want to acknowledge we've been  
7 joined by Council Member Inez Barron who is here. We  
8 are also visited by Council Member Steve Levin. Let  
9 me just ask you, Mr. Sexton. So the developer is  
10 talking about building a supermarket, which is  
11 something I know you and your union have encouraged  
12 in a lot of developments throughout the city. Have  
13 there been any discussions with the developer at all  
14 about that specific supermarket?

15 BRENDAN SEXTON: None. There have been o  
16 discussions.

17 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Have you reached out  
18 to the developer in any discussions?

19 BRENDAN SEXTON: I believe we attempted  
20 to?

21 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: I'm sorry?

22 BRENDAN SEXTON: We've attempted to.

23 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay. All right,  
24 we'll pursue it with Astoria with that. Anyway, well  
25 thank you. Anybody on the panel want to say anything

2 to this group? Okay, well thank you very much.

3 Sorry to keep people waiting. Just trying to move

4 along. I think that's everybody so--

5 [Pause]

6 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay. The next

7 panel is going to be in favor. Just give me a little

8 acknowledgement that you hear me and you're here.

9 George Roman, Theresa McKinney, Zach Giuseppe? Yes,

10 he's here. Abe Karasuo. [sp?] Karasuo it looks

11 like from 2324 Steinway. Diane Consgoloff [sp?]

12 Okay. You'll correct me when you get here, but

13 that's hard that one. Bill Bellequin [sp?] I think

14 that's it. Is Bill here? So I've got two so far.

15 Like I said, I'm reading everyone's name, and I know

16 people have other things to do today. So we

17 understand how people sometimes can't stick around,

18 but-- Almada Rodman, Andre Stiff. I'm going to ask

19 if anyone else is here to speak in favor of this

20 project whose name I haven't called. I'll add you to

21 this panel. Okay. Well, we're going to move on, and

22 this is going to be our last panel in favor of the

23 project. We have a number of people still to go in

24 opposition. Gentleman and lady, whenever you're

25 ready. Okay.

DIANE KESOGLU: Good afternoon, members of the Committee of the City Council. My name is Diane Kesoglu [sp?]. I have been living across from the development of Astoria Cove for 20 years. I have attended many meetings, and have followed the progress regarding this project, along with my fellow associates from the Old Astoria Neighborhood Association. I have heard many views, pros and cons of this development. My humble view and opinion is this: If you were to pass by the area in question during the day, you would see a rundown ugly industrial site that does not belong there any more. In the night time, you would not pass by since it is a haven for riff-raff and mayhem. In fact, when I look out my bedroom window on the second floor, I see a police car stationed there nightly. Throughout the years of living in Astoria, I have watched it grow tremendously and beautifully.

We all know that a number of the nicest developments in Astoria were created, in fact, by the developer Alma, Mr. Valiotis, and in general by the private sector. I plead along with my neighbors for you to allow this development, with oversight of course, to go forth since it benefits no one to leave

2 it the way it is, and it will benefit everyone to  
3 allow it to happen. It will give all the residents  
4 in the surrounding area a sense of worth. It will  
5 create jobs and commerce, and last by not least, it  
6 will give great beauty to the neighborhood. Thank  
7 you very much.

8 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you. Do you  
9 want to pronounce your last name for me one more  
10 time?

11 DIANE KESOGLU: Kesoglu.

12 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Kesoglu. That's  
13 Greek, right?

14 DIANE KESOGLU: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Can you say  
16 Constantinides very well? I'm sure you can.

17 DIANE KESOGLU: Oh, yes. [laughs]

18 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Yes. Sorry.

19 ZACH GIUSEPPE: Good afternoon. My name  
20 is Zach Giuseppe. It's a French name as you know.  
21 I'm here today because I live just one block from the  
22 Astoria Cove development, and I support it, the  
23 development of the Astoria Cove because of jobs.  
24 That's my motivation to support the project is  
25 because to create jobs in the neighborhood. Yes, the

2 question about affordable housing I'm not against  
3 affordable housing, but let's understand that this  
4 development is private money. And if we can find a  
5 common ground between the community and the developer  
6 to work it, to find a way to develop it, I'm all for  
7 it. Must of we Americans we build. We don't build  
8 any more in this country. So the building of the  
9 Astoria Cove project is not only for us. It's for  
10 the future generations that's going to come after  
11 this. And much of that-- I'm a film maker. I live  
12 in the neighborhoods. I don't want to fly to Canada  
13 to go film when I can film in my neighborhood and  
14 create jobs in my community. So my motivation on  
15 this particular project is that it creates jobs, and  
16 this guys, it's find it in your understanding and  
17 give the go-ahead for the project to go ahead.  
18 That's my motivation.

19 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you very much.  
20 Now, I understand we have people to read testimony  
21 from two of the people I called. So whoever wants to  
22 go first. Just grab a mic, give your name, and say  
23 what testimony you're reading. If you can do it with  
24 two minutes, you get a gold star.

2 GIOVANNI SIMEONE: Good afternoon. My  
3 name is Giovanni Simeone. I'll be reading for George  
4 Roman. My name is George Roman. I'm a resident of  
5 Astoria Houses now for 17 years. Astoria Cove is  
6 extremely important to me because I have young  
7 siblings that are being raised in this neighborhood.  
8 I've heard many positive ideas about the Astoria Cove  
9 development so far. One thing I'm excited, very  
10 excited about is the opportunity for this project to  
11 bring jobs into the neighborhood. I'm starting  
12 Queens College next semester, and I will be working  
13 my union job by night. My daily commute will be  
14 difficult especially while I must juggle in order to  
15 get to class on time, and then to get to my job by  
16 the time of my work shift in Manhattan. The union  
17 jobs that will be brought to my neighborhood will be  
18 extreme beneficial to me. Walking to work will not  
19 only make my life a whole lot easier, but would also  
20 benefit the lives other residents around the  
21 community who also want to work on or as a result of  
22 the development.

23 The jobs will give an opportunity for  
24 residents to improve their lives. My neighbors who  
25 gain new employment opportunities will be trained to

2 work in construction jobs, and skills that translate  
3 to other careers. Permanent jobs will also be  
4 available in security and building maintenance,  
5 something a lot of us are looking forward to. These  
6 opportunities are the boost that current residents  
7 need for strong careers. Currently, Astoria Houses  
8 is a secluded area, and there aren't many resources  
9 for people to benefit from. Residents of Astoria  
10 Houses currently need to take a bus just to buy fresh  
11 produce. We are in desperate need of a nearby  
12 supermarket. I believe this development is a great  
13 idea because it will allow new businesses we need to  
14 open up making them more accessible to Astoria Houses  
15 residents. I ask you to approve the Astoria Cove  
16 Development for the betterment of my generation, and  
17 those who will follow in our community. Thank you.

18 [bell]

19 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Good job. Thank  
20 you. Ma'am, whenever you're ready.

21 KAYLEN ALEXANDER: Good afternoon,  
22 Council Members. My name is Kaylen Alexander reading  
23 on behalf of Theresa McKinney, an Astoria resident.

24 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Just a little closer  
25 to the microphone.



2 KAYLEN ALEXANDER: My name is Theresa  
3 McKinney. I have been living in Astoria Houses for  
4 37 years. My husband and I are raising our family  
5 here. Astoria Cove is a great project because it is  
6 going to create lots of new opportunities for the  
7 entire neighborhood. I'm particularly excited about  
8 the developer's commitment to create a cooperatively  
9 owned supermarket. Through a supermarket, our  
10 community will have access to fresh food and as  
11 owners have opportunities to benefit from the  
12 infusion of new residents and investment. I have  
13 worked in a supermarket for the past 17 years as a  
14 merchandiser and manager. I am eager to be a family  
15 member of this cooperative supermarket, and be not  
16 just a worker but also an owner.

17 All too often when new development  
18 happens in a neighborhoods, outside cooperations --  
19 I'm sorry -- corporations come in, and are able to  
20 take advantage of new residents' consumer spending.  
21 Through this cooperative supermarket existing Astoria  
22 residents will be able to build wealth and equity  
23 keeping money within the neighborhood. I am looking  
24 forward to sharing my skills and experience to be a  
25 part of it. It would be a privilege for me to work

2 in my neighborhood and serve the members of my  
3 community. For a long time there has been a lack of  
4 infrastructure upgrades in and around the Astoria  
5 Houses Hallet's Cove neighborhood. The Astoria  
6 development, especially the new park, esplanade, and  
7 open waterfront that my family can enjoy and do it on  
8 the weekends, will be great. I also look forward to  
9 welcoming the new faces of neighbors that this  
10 development will bring to the community because it  
11 needs a makeover. Please count me as a strong  
12 supporter of Astoria Cove.

13 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Great. Thank you.  
14 Anybody have any questions. Okay, thank you very  
15 much. Okay, next. Okay, again if I call you're here  
16 just let me know you're here so I know how many we  
17 have. These are in opposition once again. Maya  
18 Montalki [sp?]

19 MALE SPEAKER: [off mic] No.

20 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: No. Okay. Phyllis  
21 Hornbeck [sp?]. Maria Sterling. Isadora Gespi? No.  
22 James Taylor. Mr. Taylor. Judith Goldener,  
23 Goldiner? No. Okay. Is it John Semme? No. Okay.  
24 Maria Consuelos [sp?]. Sean Vacione? Is anyone else  
25 here> Is that it? Anyone else in opposition who I

2 did not call? No. Now, we've got a fourth anyway,  
3 but that's okay. Okay, whenever you're ready.

4 [laughs]

5                   MARIA STERLING: Hi, my name is Maria  
6 Sterling. I am here to represent the Brooklyn Jewish  
7 Hospital in Brooklyn, New York. I think everything  
8 pretty much has been covered in regards the attempt  
9 of Alma to destabilize those apartments. I ask that  
10 the Council will vote no on the Astoria Park project  
11 until they demonstrate in their actions that they are  
12 committed to affordable housing. And that they  
13 desist and de cease destabilizing all of those  
14 apartments that are already destabilized. I  
15 appreciate the elected officials that have come here  
16 today to support what's happening to us, and I  
17 appreciate the Council taking our testimonies today.  
18 Thank you.

19                   CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you very much.  
20 Who wants to go next? Okay.

21                   PHYLLIS HORNBECK: Hi, my name is Phyllis  
22 Hornbeck. I'm also a resent of the Brooklyn Jewish  
23 Hospital. I think we've talked a lot today about the  
24 track record that Alma has shown in their actions and  
25 not just words. And just one thing that I wanted to

2 address is Maria and I are here both on the behalf of  
3 the Tenants' Association. And in response to the  
4 question about what notification did Alma give to the  
5 tenants about the building going market rate, and us  
6 getting market rate leases. They claimed on the  
7 record that they notified the Tenant's Association,  
8 and met with the Tenants Association, and that we  
9 were aware. I have no idea what they're talking  
10 about. I've spoken with over 200 tenants in our  
11 buildings, and not one person mentioned that. The  
12 Tenants Association did not meet with them. So at  
13 best, he is misinformed, and at worst that's, you  
14 know, just a lie. So, I think it's something that  
15 should just be added in consideration, and I stand  
16 with Maria and all of the tenants, and all of the  
17 tenants of the Brooklyn Jewish Hospital to ask that  
18 the Council vote no until these issues can be  
19 resolved.

20 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: All right, thank  
21 you. All right, what is your name just to-- Are you  
22 representing somebody or are you here on your own?

23 MARIA CONSUELOS: I just live in the  
24 area?

2 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay, what's your  
3 name.

4 MARIA CONSUELOS: Maria Consuelos [sp?].

5 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay. Go ahead.  
6 I'm sorry, we just didn't know which one you were.

7 MARIA CONSUELOS: I just, I want you to  
8 oppose--

9 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: A little closer to  
10 the mic. I'm sorry.

11 MARIA CONSUELOS: I just want you to  
12 oppose to like oppose all the different buildings on  
13 that because they don't have a good reputation, and  
14 it sounds like they're going to build a straight  
15 wall. [sic] Like it just-- and I've lived in the  
16 area for like 15 years now, and I never see anyone  
17 really care about the area until they find out that  
18 they can make some kind of money and some kind of  
19 profit. And they can also check my view. So I was  
20 thinking, you know--

21 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Where do you live  
22 exactly?

23 MARIA CONSUELOS: I live right on 8th  
24 Street and 27th Avenue. So I'm like right next to  
25 where they're trying to build.

2 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay. So I just--  
3 before I get to the last person. So you live right  
4 over there, but--

5 MARIA CONSUELOS: [interposing] Yeah.

6 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: --you know, we saw a  
7 video, and we saw a presentation of what 8th Street  
8 looks like today and that area around there. And  
9 I've been there myself a few times at Whitey Ford  
10 Field for something for my son. And that area is  
11 pretty rundown looking over there. Do you agree?

12 MARIA CONSUELOS: Yeah, the bus never  
13 come. There are holes where if you fall in them, you  
14 can just fell it, they're so big. So, like I think  
15 they should be fixing that first. Fixing it up a  
16 little bit.

17 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Uh-huh, okay.

18 MARIA CONSUELOS: And there's a lot of  
19 like, you know, some areas you can't really go into  
20 at night that you can't really pass. I mean it used  
21 to be a lot worse, but it's gotten better through the  
22 years, but maybe in the '90s it was a lot worse.

23 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay.

24 MARIA CONSUELOS: And I just-- I would  
25 like to see it more fixed with the streets especially

2 and transportation, and it's not affordable like the  
3 buildings that they want to build.

4 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay. All right,  
5 well let's get to Mr. Taylor whom I interrupted.

6 JAMES TAYLOR: Okay, good afternoon.  
7 Thank you very much for listening to my testimony. I  
8 would also like to thank Mr. Chair Weprin and the  
9 rest of the Council Members who are present and those  
10 who are not able to be here. My name is James  
11 Taylor. I worked at Woodside Apartments in the Bronx  
12 for 20 years. I was there along with my co-workers,  
13 a good union job, good benefits, a livable wage and a  
14 pension. Now, what happened in our case was Alma  
15 Realty bought the property, kicked out the union,  
16 took away our salary, took away our benefits, took  
17 away our pension. And had no recourse and no remorse  
18 in doing that, and actually interrupting my family  
19 life, which was providing benefits, a good salary and  
20 a pension for us to be able to take care of our  
21 families. And I don't think that the question is  
22 about the development. I think the problem is the  
23 developer. I think the problem is that Alma Realty  
24 has a track record of coming in like wolves in  
25 sheep's clothing promising everything, the Brooklyn

2 Bridge with no cables. But as soon as they get the  
3 green light, they go back to their old practices and  
4 not working with working families who all we want to  
5 do is a decent day's work for an honest day's pay.  
6 This company has a bad track record or not supporting  
7 working families. And what we're asking is that they  
8 definitely get a serious look from the Council. I've  
9 also testified at the Community Board, and I also  
10 testified in front of the Honorable Melinda Katz in  
11 Queens. And I'm just hoping that you get the same  
12 support that they gave to this project. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, sir. Any  
14 members of the panel have any comments or questions  
15 for this group. I see none. We thank you very much.  
16 I'd like to ask if there is anyone else here today  
17 who wants to testify either in favor or against this  
18 project. I see none. I am then going to close the  
19 public hearing portion of our negotiations. We've  
20 heard a lot here today, and some issues that need to  
21 be resolved, but we will see if we can resolve them.  
22 And over the course of the next couple of weeks we  
23 hope to have meetings and discussions taking into  
24 consideration a lot of what we heard today.



2           So I want to thank everyone for their  
3 cooperation today. You were very good about keeping  
4 quiet and not being any loud outbursts, and I thank  
5 the developer who is still here now for sticking  
6 around. And we really appreciate everyone helping  
7 out, my colleagues who are here. And with that in  
8 mind, the Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises is  
9 now adjourned? [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date October 23, 2014