Testimony of UPROSE

Brooklyn Borough President - Industry City Rezoning Public Hearing

January 14th, 2020
209 Joralemon St
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today on Industry City’s rezoning proposal. I am Elizabeth Yeampierre, the Executive Director of UPROSE. We are here today to express our strong opposition to Industry City’s existing rezoning application, which has not changed since 2017. Founded in 1966, UPROSE is Brooklyn’s oldest Latino community-based organization. UPROSE is an intergenerational, multi-racial, and nationally recognized women of color-led organization that promotes just sustainability and resiliency in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. We are leaders in climate justice and all of our work is rooted in the Just Transition model. Industry City’s proposal is problematic in many ways that threaten the working-class character, affordability, and social cohesion of the Sunset Park community. If Industry City wants to develop in Sunset Park, they must do so in context. They must amend their proposal to incorporate the recommendations of the Green Resilient Industrial District (GRID) that are based on existing community-based plans; years of community engagement, organizing, and community planning; and current State and City policy that address the urgency to transition to a renewable economy.

Industry City wants to create an “Innovation District”, but there is nothing “innovative” about predatory development and gentrification. What Industry City is doing to Sunset Park has been done all over New York City. The City’s invaluable industrial manufacturing spaces have become sacrifice zones for developer’s greedy agendas. Industry City’s proposal disregards that an

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industrial sector needs to be used to build for our climate future. It is time for communities to be able to responsibly -and with accurate information and resources- guide development in their communities so it responds to their needs. So, if Industry City wants to develop and make a profit in Sunset Park, they need to follow the community-led framework and vision. What Industry City is doing to Sunset Park has been done all over New York City in Williamsburg, DUMBO, Red Hook, Lower East Side, and Chelsea just to name a few. So if Industry City wants to have the privilege of developing in Sunset Park, they must follow a community-led framework and vision.

**The Green Resilient Industrial District**

The Sunset Park community is being led to believe that Industry City’s rezoning is the only viable model of economic development on the waterfront, which is not true and undermines the hard work, dedication, and frontline leadership of community-based organizations like UPROSE. UPROSE partnered with the Protect Our Working Waterfront Alliance (POWWA) to create the Green Resilient Industrial District (GRID)- an alternative proposal. The creation of the GRID honors all the local planning processes, community priorities, and integrates principles of equity.

The GRID outlines the process of how to move from an extractive economy dependent on fossil fuels to a green industrial economy that trains local residents for renewable energy, green retrofit, and sustainable manufacturing and construction jobs. The GRID calls to 1. Preserve the industrial character of Sunset Park’s working waterfront, 2. Retain and create well-paid working-class jobs in a green industrial economy, 3. Support green industrial innovation, and 4. Promote climate resiliency and Just Transition through circular industrial economy practices.

Implementation of a GRID would also protect Sunset Park from existing and anticipated climate threats. The GRID identifies strategies of how to utilize the industrial sector as the economic engine that builds for climate adaptation, mitigation, and resilience. The GRID analyzes the different land uses and building typologies in Sunset Park, and strategizes how each area can incorporate principles of sustainability and resiliency to work cohesively to achieve the proposal’s objectives. The GRID proposal is divided into four distinct sub-areas described in Figure 1.
A. Sub Area A: Green waterfront and industrial core  
B. Sub Area B: Green transportation and sustainable light industrial area  
C. Sub Area C: Green manufacturing and design area (Industry City’s rezoning area)  
D. Sub Area D: Residential sustainability pilot

The GRID is an alternative rezoning plan for Sunset Park. Unlike Industry City’s proposal, the GRID includes the entire industrial waterfront and Sunset Park community and recognizes the relationships between urban systems of water, food, energy, and jobs. The GRID can be leveraged to prevent the realization of Industry City’s existing rezoning proposal.

**GRID Implementation**

We are asking Community Board 7 to leverage the GRID to influence Industry City’s rezoning proposal in three main ways:
1. Amend Industry City’s proposal with necessary changes that establishes restrictions on use and bulk in accordance with Sub Area C of the GRID. The GRID has specific recommendations and zoning guidelines for each of the four sub areas. The zoning and land use restrictions recommended for sub area C, or Industry City’s proposed rezoning area, would limit non-industrial uses such as retail and commercial spaces in order to enhance the manufacturing use of the M3 zone.

2. Use the GRID as a necessary amendment to the Sunset Park 197-A Plan that guides policy and community vision. The 197-A Plans must be updated every ten years, but the Sunset Park 197-A Plan has not been updated to incorporate the newest risks and lessons learned of climate impacts. Industry City claims its proposal is consistent with the Sunset Park 197-A Plan, but the plan is outdated.

3. Challenge Industry City’s proposal as another 197-C Plan that implements a community-led vision. The GRID is a viable alternative rezoning proposal that integrates community input. Industry City’s proposal does not consider or integrate aspects of community-based planning. Further detail on how to use the GRID to influence Industry City’s proposal will be shared at the Community Board meeting on Thursday, December 12th at 6:30pm.

Industry City can exist in Sunset Park, just not on their own terms. The GRID is not only a comprehensive vision and plan, but rules and guidelines that dictate the type of development allowable in Sunset Park that will support the transition into an equitable climate resilient industrial community and green economy.

**Policy Landscape**

UPROSE, as a grassroots Steering Committee member of NY Renews was part of the monumental passing of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) earlier this year, that lays the groundwork for addressing climate change and climate justice issues. The law is poised to be the most ambitious climate legislation in the country, which allows New York to be a leader in climate change. Within the state, New York City must be a leader in the state and create a way for local CLCPA implementation and investment that honors community-based planning and process.
The GRID is not a futuristic vision. It is a proposal that operationalizes existing local, state, and federal policies such as the Climate Mobilization Act (CMA), CLCPA, and the anticipated Green New Deal that offers funding sources for GRID implementation. Industrial spaces across the country are disappearing. New York City only has six Significant Maritime and Industrial Zones, and the largest one is in Sunset Park. Sunset Park has 14 million square feet of industrial manufacturing space to use to build for a true climate adaptive economy.

The mandates in the CLCPA will help shift our energy systems and economy in a just and equitable process from an extractive one to a regenerative one that is aligned with the Just Transition Model. The enactment of the CLCPA will reduce economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions 85% by 2050 with net zero economy-wide emissions. Similar to local and federal policies, the CLCPA offers opportunities for funding a green economy. The CLCPA mandates that 35% of benefits go to “disadvantaged” or frontline communities. The CLCPA lays the groundwork for equitable renewable energy development; it calls for a 250% increase in solar capacity by 2025 to achieve a 70% renewable energy portfolio by 2030. Industry City’s proposal is not only inconsistent with these policies, it threatens funding sources that will support a Just Transition.

**Job Opportunities**

Preserving the industrial sector is a local struggle with regional impacts. Sunset Park has the opportunity to catalyze regional climate engagement from climate jobs, green ports, sustainable manufacturing, food security, and renewable energy. The CLCPA and CMA are projected to create over 150,000 climate jobs. Many of these climate jobs are in the retrofit, renewable energy, and construction sectors. According to the International Labour Organization, “Green jobs are decent jobs that contribute to preserve or restore the environment, be they in traditional sectors such as manufacturing and construction, or in new, emerging green sectors such as renewable energy or energy efficiency.” In order to ensure the economic benefits from the CLCPA and the CMA, we must keep our industrial sectors such as Sunset Park, industrial, to host the existing and new industrial sector climate jobs.
Since 2013, Industry City has caused a significant increase in service and retail jobs that replaced many longtime industrial manufacturing jobs. According to the Longitudinal Employer Household Dynamics (LEHD) Survey, since 2013, Sunset Park has seen a 32% increase in service and office sector jobs. The large proportion of service sector jobs is depicted in Figure 2 above. Industry City is trying to sell the community on the number of jobs their proposal will create, but these jobs are lower paid and the vast majority do not offer employee benefits or opportunities for career growth. According to the New York State Department of Labor, the average annual wage for manufacturing work is over $53,000 compared to $36,000 for retail work and $24,500 for employment in food service.
Industry City’s jobs do not come without a price. Forty percent of Sunset Park residents do not have a high school diploma. Industrial jobs are a means for many Sunset Park residents to make a well-paid living and have access to professional growth opportunities. Industry City is creating service and retail jobs for the community while also gentrifying the neighborhood. Lower paid jobs and higher rental prices and cost of homes have already led to and will exacerbate loss of social cohesion.

**Industry City’s Proposal**

Contrary to the GRID, developers including Jamestown Properties have invaded Sunset Park’s industrial waterfront with luxury commercial and retail uses in the form of Industry City. These types of developments are not only detrimental to the industrial character our working waterfronts, but also puts the Sunset Park community in harm’s way of climate impacts. As a City, we need to be able to face these challenges by building a resilient waterfront. It is

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important as a community, we have the agency and resources to determine what a climate resilient industrial waterfront looks like.

Industry City’s rezoning proposal would change the industrial waterfront for retail and commercial use. Along with expanding retail, Industry City also proposes to develop hotels and a school at the waterfront. These pose direct risks to the community that will be using these facilities since it is located in floodplains and brownfields. Industry City’s proposal is not only disrupting social cohesion and eliminating well-paid working-class jobs, but also prevents us from moving forward with utilizing the industrial waterfront to prepare for climate change.

But, there is nothing “innovative” putting frontline communities in harm’s way by not using the industrial sector for resilient green industry. It is not responsible for developers to build schools, hotels, or luxury retail spaces along an industrial waterfront that is in the floodplain.

Much of Sunset Park’s industrial waterfront is located in a floodplain, but Industry City’s proposal does not integrate any climate adaptation or mitigation strategies to protect the community from the threats of climate change. Instead, Industry City is proposing to locate a high school on the industrial waterfront, which would young people of color in harm’s way. The floodplain and sea level rise maps below emphasize the urgency and necessity to prioritize climate preparedness in all development especially on our industrial waterfront.

Figure 4: List of plans, programs, and policies that the GRID is consistent with.

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Figure 5: Industry City Project Area and Future Floodplain in 2020s with Sea Level Rise

Figure 6: Industry City Project Area and Future Floodplain in 2100s with Sea Level Rise

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Community Benefits Agreement

A Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) will not prevent the negative impacts of Industry City’s rezoning proposal. CBAs are designed as tools to buy the community’s favor, but fall short of enacting protections to mitigate the negative effects of rezonings. There are many examples throughout the city where CBAs are not realized because they are very difficult to enforce. Another issue with CBAs, is the timeline of receiving the said “community benefits”. If any benefits are realized, they often do not benefit the existing community due to the loss of social cohesion. A CBA is not a viable solution to ensure community input in Industry City’s rezoning process.
Offshore Wind

UPROSE’s work and advocacy supports eco-industrial developments such as offshore wind. Developing offshore wind in Sunset Park is a more fitting use of the industrial waterfront than retail, hotels, or schools. It would make New York City a leader in building climate resiliency by creating clean energy in an area made for industrial use. Offshore wind turbines are not only a long-term viable answer for the future, but also for creating high-skilled work for local residents. According to Equinor, offshore wind turbines will bring 50-70 jobs to the community. The proposed 60-80 wind turbines will reduce 1.6 million tons of CO2 per year. New York City already has enough retail space, it is not a necessary development and will not help us prepare for future storms. Focus has to be directed in creating resilient shorelines which will better prepare us in the face of climate change.

Closing

Industry City’s current rezoning proposal is unacceptable. As it stands, it proposes to further dearticulate the existing and historical character of the industrial waterfront, while displacing existing businesses and the potential to build for the City and region’s climate needs. We are asking the Community Board to only approve Industry City’s proposal if they modify it to include the recommendations outlined in the GRID proposal. If Industry City does not modify their rezoning application, we ask CB7 to do right by Sunset Park and vote “no” to the rezoning. The community has an alternative vision, and we’re here to make it clear that at this point in time private-led development is no longer an option. We need and demand a Just Transition for Sunset Park.

For more information, visit our website at uprose.org/the-grid.