Testimony to Brooklyn Community Board 7
Industry City Rezoning Application

By Lew Daly
Senior Policy Analyst
December 9, 2019

Thank you to Brooklyn Community Board 7 for this opportunity to comment on the proposal currently before this board, namely, Industry City’s application to rezone the Sunset Park industrial waterfront for commercial development. My name is Lew Daly and I am a Senior Policy Analyst with Demos, a public policy think tank based in New York City. Demos works nationally and statewide in support of policy development for an inclusive and equitable economy and democracy.

The proposal to rezone millions of square feet of the Sunset Park industrial waterfront from heavy manufacturing to mixed-use commercial zoning is fundamentally misguided. It follows a business-as-usual playbook of economic development—one that is designed for the benefit of developers and corporations while providing consistently bad results for communities and their residents, small and locally-owned businesses, and quality of life for vulnerable populations.

Further, and no less urgent, the rezoning proposal is deeply misaligned with the state’s new climate law, The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA). The CLCPA codifies strong, economy-wide GHG emissions reductions and establishes equity standards in policy implementation, prioritizing protections and benefits for vulnerable communities like Sunset Park. The proposed commercial rezoning flies in the face of such goals and promises a significant setback for the kind of equitable and sustainable development envisioned by the CLCPA as well as by related local and citywide planning efforts that give voice and choice to community leaders and residents.

Commercial development of the Sunset Park waterfront forecloses a major opportunity to expand local and community-owned clean energy production and, in a high-poverty, high-unemployment community, to create hundreds of good quality jobs in renewable energy manufacturing and installation, energy storage, and energy efficiency services. Not just preserving but investing in the industrial potential of this valuable waterfront, especially for climate needs, is clearly the way forward for Sunset Park, its residents, and its resilience for employment, local business, and climate needs alike.

Green industrial revitalization of this waterfront should also be seen as a local vision with regional impacts, connecting job creation and upward mobility for residents with cleaner ports, enhanced regional rail and waterborne shipping capacity, and regional supply chains that grow good jobs right here in our communities. A Demos study found that investments necessary to achieve the state’s new climate goals will support as many as 220,000 new jobs over a decade. At approximately $26 per hour, according to a 2019 Brookings Institution report on green jobs,
average wages in the clean energy sector are roughly double those in the retail sector. Who will get these higher quality jobs depends on community planning and leadership in support of the right kind of development for the pressing climate needs of our city, region, and state. Brooklyn Community Board 7’s support for preserving and harnessing the green industrial potential of the Sunset Park waterfront is vital and should stand in the way of the proposed commercial rezoning.

Industry’s City’s proposal asks policymakers to put luxury hotels and high-end retail before the needs of Sunset Park residents and to ignore the clear will of community leaders as expressed in the Sunset Park 197-A Plan as well as other policy proposals developed with significant community input, such as the Waterfront Revitalization Plan, the Climate Mobilization Act, the statewide Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, and the national Green New Deal. Their proposal does not consider climate mitigation or adaptation at all, let alone as core development principles, nor does their environmental impact analysis consider damaging collateral effects of gentrification and displacement as commercial development drives up rents while keeping local wages down.

Sunset Park’s valuable, high-potential waterfront should not be sacrificed for yet more commercial development that is keeping down wages and killing small businesses in working-class and poor communities all over New York City. The primary goal of such development is corporate profits at the expense of good jobs for the community and sustainable development for the local economy. There is a better way forward for the working-class communities of Brooklyn and throughout New York City.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments on this vital planning decision.