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Hudson Yards plan.

A potential new home for the Jets sparks controversy as New York City sets the stage for an ambitious plan to redevelop a large portion of the Hudson Yards area of far west midtown in Manhattan.

# A Far West Side Story

SAM NEWBERG

Underused for years, the far west side of Manhattan has been eyed as an ideal location for additional office space in the New York region, as well as for residential development, especially affordable housing. The Hudson Yards area of the far west side, located along the Hudson River and bounded roughly by 28th Street to the south, 42nd Street to the north, and Eighth Avenue on the east, is at the center of recent ambitious plans to transform the area into a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood.

“Redevelopment of the Hudson Yards area on the west side of Manhattan is a high priority for the Bloomberg Administration,” says Andrew M. Alper, president of the New York City Economic Development Corporation. “The area has long been overlooked, but with strategic planning, it will become one of the keys to the economic growth of New York City over the next 30 years, featuring a vital central business district integrated with new housing and retail space and inviting open spaces that connect to the waterfront.”

“We are going to create a great place [there],” says Amanda Burden, director of New York City’s department of city planning and chair of the City Planning Commission. “It will be a great neighborhood with special character, and that is essential for the future of the city.”

The plan for Hudson Yards currently moving through the city approval process calls for the decking over of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) rail yards, construction of 28 million square feet of office space and 12,000 residential units over the next 30 years, a two-station extension of the Number 7 subway line, the creation of 23 acres of open space, an expansion of the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, and the construction of the 75,000-seat New York Sports and Convention Center stadium and event space, which will be home not only to the New York Jets football team, but possibly also to the 2012 Olympic Games.



The plan for the far west side of Manhattan currently making its way through the city approval process includes residential and office development, with 23 acres of open space and an extension of the Number 7 subway line. Also under consideration in a separate review process are an expansion of the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center and the construction of a 75,000-seat New York Sports and Convention Center stadium and event space.



A large portion of the plan calls for significant upfront public investment, including the subway extension and the decking over of the rail yards. Public investment will be mostly paid for by a zoning change, which will generate additional taxes collected in lieu of increased property values. Although the plan has been met with some controversy—primarily over the Jets stadium—work will likely begin on the project in 2005.

#### Hudson Yards Today

Hudson Yards comprises a variety of uses, including the existing Hell's Kitchen neighborhood. Much of the area is prime for redevelopment. To say that the Hudson Yards area is underused is an understatement, considering its proximity to midtown Manhattan.

Hudson Yards has vast expanses of one-story buildings, surface parking, and vehicle storage, and is cut by train tracks and road infrastructure leading to and from the Lincoln Tunnel. Nearly 10 percent of the Hudson Yards area is dedicated to viaducts and ramps for roads and rail, with very little open and park space.

The existing Javits Center occupies 760,000 square feet, and when expanded will contain 1.3 million square feet of space, including an 86,000-square-foot ballroom, in addition to a convention center hotel.

Considering its proximity to the midtown Manhattan office core, Hudson Yards has long been targeted for substantial office development. A 2001 report by the Group of 35, a task force formed in early 2000 to address the shortage of commercial office space in

New York City, cochaired by Senator Charles E. Schumer and former Treasury Secretary Robert E. Rubin, indicated demand for an additional 60 million square feet of office space in the next 20 years, and recommended that 20 million of it be located in the Hudson Yards area.

New York's department of city planning followed suit in 2002, hiring a multidisciplinary team of planners, architects, and transportation experts to create a plan for Hudson Yards. Burden explains, "We understand the process of creating a great place, and that assembling a design team to create a plan was critical."

The design team, led by the New York office of Cooper, Robertson & Partners, working with the department of city planning, hosted nearly 75 outreach meetings with community groups; city, state, and federal organizations; and business entities, allowing for substantial input. Meetings were held between 2002 and 2004, culminating with the release of an environmental impact statement in June 2004.

According to the department of city planning, the objectives of the Hudson Yards plan are as follows:

- to create a vibrant, transit- and pedestrian-oriented neighborhood with a mix of commercial, residential, entertainment, and cultural uses;
- to help secure the city's economic future by creating opportunities for new office development and job growth;
- to cover over open cuts of the Amtrak Empire line and the Eastern Rail Yards;

The expansion of the Javits Convention Center would nearly double the current square footage, to 1.3 million square feet of space.



The existing Hell's Kitchen neighborhood adjacent to the Hudson Yards area is marked by lower-density residential and retail uses, which will be reinforced by the new plans for the far west side.



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- to develop a comprehensive network of open space and parks consisting of 20-plus acres;
- to bring people to the Hudson River with two parks west of 11th Avenue;
- to provide housing opportunities for people of all income levels; and
- to reinforce the existing, low-scale Hell's Kitchen neighborhood.

The aforementioned Javits Convention Center expansion and the proposed Jets stadium are not formally part of the plan, as they are owned by the state of New York and are therefore part of a separate review process.

### Public Improvements

The foundation of the Hudson Yards plan is public infrastructure. "We needed a significant public investment to transform this place, and that means upfront investment in transit and the creation of open space," explains Vishaan Chakrabarti, director of the Manhattan office of the department of city planning.

Approximately \$5 billion will be spent on public improvements, including \$2 billion for the Number 7 subway extension; \$800 million for decks over two rail yards (the Jets stadium would be built over one of them); \$200 million for a retractable roof on the stadium, enabling indoor events to be held in addition to football; \$1.4 billion for the expansion of the Javits Center; and \$500 million for parks and open-space improvements.

"We learned from Canary Wharf in London that real estate values really took off only after the Jubilee Line of the Underground was extended, so we are building the Number 7 subway extension ahead of time," Chakrabarti explains. "Conservative estimates show an \$80 billion return on our \$5 billion investment in the next 30 years."

The extension of the Number 7 subway line is perceived as the linchpin that will drive development. "This city operates on the subway," explains David McGregor, managing director of Cooper, Robertson & Partners in New York and project manager for the Hudson Yards plan. "The lack of subway access is why no signifi-

Plans for the far west side will expand the development emanating from the midtown Manhattan office core and reopen connections to the Hudson River.



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cant development has occurred to date in Hudson Yards, and is fundamental for any future development.”

The existing Number 7 originates in Queens, near Shea Stadium, serves Grand Central Station, and terminates at Times Square, crossing all north/south subway lines in Manhattan. Upon completion of the Number 7 extension, nearly all of Hudson Yards will be within a half-mile walk of a subway station.

Another major public investment will be the decking over of the rail yards mentioned previously. Long Island Rail Road commuter trains serving Penn Station use the stadium site, located four blocks west, for daytime storage. The existing storage yard, consisting of two 13-acre sections, is currently below grade, and would be decked over to construct the stadium above one section, and 5 million square feet of development and six acres of open space above the other, while maintaining its current use below.

### Open Space

The creation of open space is a final significant public investment for Hudson Yards. “Less than one-half of 1 percent of Hudson Yards currently is open space,” explains McGregor. A key element of the plan is to dedicate over 20 acres of Hudson Yards to open space.

The most notable open space will be a mid-block boulevard between Tenth and 11th avenues, extending from the six-acre open

space near the stadium on the south to 42nd Street on the north. The intention is to break up the long blocks typical of Manhattan that urbanist Jane Jacobs famously criticized in her book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, creating more valuable mid-block real estate and luring a concentration of new high-rise office development.

A second open-space proposal involves improving connections to the Hudson River Park and public trail. The existing Javits Center occupies a five-block area along the river, effectively cutting off access from the Hell’s Kitchen neighborhood. The Hudson Yards plan would create four formal connections to the river, including one “glass tube” through the expanded Javits Center, according to McGregor.

A third open-space element is a proposed park along the northern edge of the proposed stadium. Called the 34th Street Park, it would create a visual and physical connection to the Hudson River and the existing Hudson River Park.

An additional proposal for the Hudson Yards plan is the High Line, an elevated section of disused railway that enters the area from the south. It is hoped that a bicycle and recreation trail can be constructed along its route, which would effectively terminate at the proposed stadium but connect to the mid-block park.

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The proposed New York Sports and Convention Center stadium will rise above the existing Long Island Rail Road storage yard. The rail yard is currently below grade and would be decked over to construct the stadium, as well as 5 million square feet of development and six acres of open space, while maintaining its current use below.

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By far the most controversial element of the plan is the construction of the New York Sports and Convention Center stadium. To counter criticism about using a prime riverfront site for a facility that will be used for only eight football games a year, 200,000 square feet of convention space has been added to the design, as well as a retractable roof so that events can be held year round on the field.

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Improvements to the High Line are not part of the Hudson Yards plan, but they could happen simultaneously.

**Zoning**

Major zoning changes at Hudson Yards would lead to the eventual creation of the aforementioned 12,000 new housing units and 28 million square feet of office space. The \$5 billion in upfront public investments will be paid for in lieu of increased tax revenue from future intensified development built as a result of zoning changes.

Densities will increase significantly over much of the area. Floor/area ratios will be 18 for office development and 12 for residential development. Densities for office buildings in select areas could also increase through the distribution of air rights from a portion of the rail yards, and will be focused on areas such as the commercial core between Tenth and 11th avenues.

**Design Standards**

Urban design figures prominently in the Hudson Yards plan, from the streetscape to building massing to how uses are mixed. It has been the intention of the city and the Cooper Robertson design team to dramatically improve numerous areas within Hudson Yards while preserving the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood fabric.

Considerable attention is given to design details in the Hudson Yards plan. The basic street grid will be maintained. The streetscape

plan will include widening of sidewalks throughout much of the area to accommodate increased pedestrian traffic. A significant portion of new development is required to have ground-floor retail space.

New development must maintain street-wall standards of 60 to 150 feet, similar to those found in adjacent areas of Manhattan. Buildings also must be tapered to avoid shear walls from being too tall. Standards are loosened slightly along 11th Avenue in the dense commercial corridor, allowing for creative design of office buildings with large floor plates.

**Housing**

Housing development opportunities will exist across Hudson Yards, and many of them will be within Hell's Kitchen. At the same time, an effort will be made to preserve the form and integrity of the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood, with the existing Ninth Avenue corridor established as the "Main Street" of the neighborhood. This area, under the rezoning plan, would have the lowest densities and be the most unchanged, but substantial demand will be expected, according to Anthony Borelli, district manager of Community Board 4, the community board for Hudson Yards. "There has been growing interest in the area by residential developers, and I won't be surprised if we get a lot more."

While there almost certainly will be demand for substantial amounts of market-rate housing, whether or not affordable housing goals will be met remains a concern. "We need more affordable housing," states Borelli, "and

there is concern that new development will drive up the cost of existing affordable units." The Hudson Yards plan seeks to address this issue, offering density bonuses as part of an inclusionary zoning scheme and a mixed-income housing program that together have the potential to generate over 2,000 units of affordable housing.

**Office**

The Hudson Yards plan is intended to attract increased office construction in an effort to remain competitive on a global scale. "The premise is that New York City must grow and continue to compete," explains Burden, "and must provide office sites suitable for large floor plates."

As mentioned earlier, total of 28 million square feet of office development is planned for Hudson Yards, much of it centered between Tenth and 11th avenues and the mid-block boulevard, but also along the existing corridors of 34th and 42nd streets, where densities found farther east in midtown would be continued.

There is some concern that Hudson Yards would be competing for office tenants with the near-term redevelopment of the World Trade Center site in lower Manhattan. However, no office development is expected in Hudson Yards until at least 2010, after the Number 7 subway extension is completed. "Lower Manhattan is the first priority for the city and Mayor Bloomberg," explains Burden. "We feel office development in Hudson Yards will follow that."

**Opposition**

The Hudson Yards plan has been received with a warm welcome for an area consistently underused and overlooked for so long. However, the proposed stadium has proven to be divisive for a variety of stakeholders.

Opinions range considerably as to whether the stadium will add to or detract from the immediate surroundings, whether it will increase or restrict access to the riverfront, whether it will encourage economic development or decrease the neighborhood's character, or whether the stadium will indeed help attract the 2012 Olympic Games.

A major concern is that because the stadium will be used for only eight football games per year, such a prized site will be underused. To counter this, 200,000 square feet of convention space has been added to the plan for the stadium, as has a retractable roof for year-round events on the field itself—thus the name the “New York Sports and Convention Center.”

Numerous community activists have come out against the Jets stadium as a component of the project, including Borelli. “It will impede, rather than encourage, the kind of riverfront development they are looking for. There are better uses for the stadium site.”

In 2003, the Hell's Kitchen Neighborhood Association (HKNA) created an alternative master plan for Hudson Yards. The plan calls for the subway extension, and could accommodate similar office square footage and residential units. Differences include different placement of uses and zoning, and the elimination of the stadium portion of the plan. Borelli describes the plan as better suited to the needs of the neighborhood and the city. “We are not NIMBYs, opposed to development. We understand this area's importance to the region, and support balanced new development here, but not the stadium.”

The city is officially considering the HKNA Plan as one of 17 alternative plans in the Hudson Yards approval process.

### Approval

The approval process for the Hudson Yards plan began in June 2004 with the release of the draft environmental impact statement and commencement of the city approval process. The process is scheduled to last seven months, with the Community Board 4, borough president, city planning commission, and city council being allowed one or two months to review the plan. The process will include numerous public hearings in which New Yorkers can voice their opinions on the project. The latter two can recommend or make changes to the plan before it is approved, probably by January 2005.

A variety of outcomes can result from the approval process. The next few months will

provide no shortage of drama in the debate over how to develop Hudson Yards, but a dramatic change in Hudson Yards is likely over the next 20 years. When Hudson Yards is given the go-ahead, it is probable that a portion of the open-space improvements will be completed within three years, the stadium and part of the Javits expansion will be done within four years, and the subway extension in five years. The evolution of Hudson Yards as a mixed-use neighborhood will follow.

Chakrabarti describes Hudson Yards as the largest planning process ever undertaken in New York City. “We all have to remember this is a long-term plan, and development will not happen overnight. We are securing the long-term potential of the city, and we think Hudson Yards will be very successful.” ■

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