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June 13, 2014

Carl Weisbrod
Chair
City Planning Commission
22 Reade Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chair Weisbrod:

I write to encourage the City Planning Commission to contextually rezone the R7-2 zone in the South Village, mapped south of Washington Square Park between LaGuardia Place/Thompson Streets and Avenue of the Americas, which has not changed since the last major revision of the Zoning map in 1961.

The prevailing built character of the South Village is highly successful and supports enduring mixed use areas with increasing development and sales value. Yet the current R7-2 zoning combined with the high values in the area encourages out-of-scale high-rise development. R7-2 zoning districts have no height restrictions but rather are governed by height factor regulations; these regulations which encourage taller buildings set back from the street and surrounded by open space are counter to existing built character. The R7-2 zone also allows for a maximum 6.5 FAR for community facility uses, as much as 90% additional bulk over the 3.44 permissible residential FAR. This allowance has already resulted in the construction of community facilities – such as educational facilities – much greater in size than the lower density residential and mixed-used buildings compromising the neighborhood. If permitted to persist unchanged, the existing zoning and ongoing development pressures could result in new construction which would be out of context with the built environment of mostly two to six story buildings that define the neighborhood's character.

In order to ensure continuing construction that reflects existing densities and protect against future out-of-context development, I ask the Department of City Planning to become the applicant on a rezoning that would create an R7-A zone for wide streets with a maximum floor

area ratio of 4 and a maximum height of 80 feet after setbacks and an R7-B zone for narrow streets with a maximum floor area ratio of 3 and a maximum height of 75 feet, while retaining the existing C1-5 commercial overlay districts. This contextual rezoning would be in keeping with other recent rezonings in Lower Manhattan, including the 2008 rezoning of the East Village which possessed a similar built environment mix and the same R7-2 zoning, and the 2005 and 2010 Far West Village Rezonings.

While some portions of the desired project area possess landmark protections, much of the area does not. With the recent nearby Hudson Square rezoning, development pressures leave the blocks south of Houston Street particularly vulnerable to out-of-scale development. For the landmarked areas, the designation does not regulate uses nor can it always prevent out-of-scale development. Indeed, a more appropriate contextual rezoning would reinforce the goals of the designation by encouraging new development and additions that are in scale and character for the South Village.

If implemented, this rezoning would preserve existing neighborhood scale, streetscape, and the distinctive character of the Village, while allowing for new context-sensitive development in the South Village. This proposal has already garnered the support of numerous neighborhood groups as well as Manhattan Community Board 2 and I urge the Commission to undertake the steps to initiate a ULURP in the zone.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Corey Johnson
City Council, 3rd District