



Regional <sup>CT  
NJ  
NY</sup> **Plan** Association

**THE FAR WEST SIDE:  
AN URBAN DESIGN ANALYSIS**

A Report by Regional Plan Association in preparation  
for the 14th Annual Regional Assembly

{ April 2004 }

# { foreword }

This paper is the third and final in a series of reports that Regional Plan Association has prepared as background for its 14th annual Regional Assembly, to be held on April 16, 2004. The City of New York has put forward an ambitious and comprehensive plan for developing the Far West Side that recognizes the potential of this part of the city. With this in mind, we've named this year's Regional Assembly "Make No Small Plans" and dedicated it to a discussion of plans for the Far West Side and their impact on the Region's future. The Assembly will bring together leaders from the public, private and academic sectors for the first comprehensive forum on this vital issue.

To best inform discussion of these plans, these reports provide background research on areas critical to determining how development on the Far West Side can be most successful and beneficial from a regional perspective. Previous reports looked at the current and future markets for office and residential development in the region, and the transportation needs and impacts associated with a new district. This final paper addresses the role that urban design and amenities play in creating vibrant, 21st Century mixed-use districts.

Regional Plan Association applauds the City of New York for its ambitious and visionary planning efforts both on the Far West Side and throughout the City. We look forward to a productive public debate that will culminate at the Regional Assembly on April 16.

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Regional Plan Association improves the quality of life and the economic competitiveness of the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut region through research, planning, and advocacy. For more than 80 years, RPA has been shaping transportation systems, protecting open spaces, and promoting better community design for the region's continued growth. We anticipate the challenges the region will face in the years to come, and we mobilize the region's civic, business, and government sectors to take action.

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## I. Introduction

Regional Plan Association has eyed the Far West Side for major redevelopment since the organization's creation in the early 1920s. As this paper will illustrate, RPA's thinking on what this revitalization should look like has changed significantly through the years as the city and metropolitan region around it have grown. For the first time, there is a serious proposal by the City and State on the table to recreate this long underutilized section of the city. It is thus an appropriate time to update the organization's thinking on the use and design of this "final frontier" in the Manhattan Central Business District.

development in the district is critical to future economic growth in both the city and the region. However, it also cautioned that market forces are likely to make it difficult to meet the City's development expectations and timetable. With an estimated 115 million square feet of vacant and planned office space in the region and a competitive global marketplace, it is clear that the area must be made extremely attractive if development objectives are to be met.

RPA's second paper, "The Far West Side: Transportation Needs and Impacts," identified two critical transportation projects in addition to extending the #7 subway line. The paper recommends building the Second Avenue Subway and constructing

RPA's analysis and recommendations are based on the goal of achieving a vibrant, mixed-use district on the Far West Side. We envision a 21st Century district where business uses are predominant but don't dominate. Its modern buildings are environmentally-friendly and nurture a tapestry of activities, with office space, housing units, retail and nightlife activities woven tightly together. It is a place with grand new public open spaces that draw its residents, workers and visitors to the great Hudson River waterfront that defines its western edge.

This paper reviews the City's plan for the area and several alternatives, and considers their ability to make this vision a reality. In addition to the City's plan we also study an MTA plan from the late 1980s and more recent plans from Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields and community group Hell's Kitchen Neighborhood Association. After surveying each plan, the report analyzes several key themes that run throughout all of them, before offering some final thoughts.

A second section of this report focuses on the most controversial aspect of the City's plan – the proposal to build a football stadium and convention center on the western portion of the Hudson Yards, a proposal jointly supported by the State. The report examines four case studies cited by stadium advocates as evidence of its potential benefits. It analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed stadium, and identifies a list of critical benchmarks or criteria that stadium supporters must satisfactorily answer to ensure that this is the best plan for the Far West Side.

The report concludes that the City's overall urban design and zoning proposal has many strong elements, including an appropriate overall density, excellent public spaces, and improved transit access. Two elements of the plan require further discussion. First, the Javits Center expansion must succeed in energizing its surroundings and re-connecting to the city and the waterfront on all four sides. Second, the report outlines the criteria that should be used to evaluate whether the most controversial element of the plan, the proposed Jets Stadium, should proceed. RPA remains concerned that the stadium could jeopardize the broader goals for revitalizing the Far West Side.



Fig. 1 – The Far West Side

In studying other great global districts – and working on one in Lower Manhattan – it's become clear that there are two building blocks of a vibrant 21st Century mixed-use district: access and amenity. The district must be more than simply accessible. It should be woven into the region's transportation network to allow easy connections to and through the area from points north, south, east and west. Just as importantly, the district will only attract vibrant life if it provides high-end amenities.

RPA's first paper on this subject, "The Far West Side and the Region's Future Development Needs," confirmed that large-scale commercial and residential

a new commuter rail tunnel under the Hudson River simultaneous to the #7 extension. To address increased automobile congestion in the district, RPA also recommends policies to reduce auto traffic in Manhattan.

Taken together, the conclusions of these two reports make it clear that for development to succeed on the Far West Side, a superior urban design plan and amenity package will be necessary. Thus, in this third paper we turn our attention to an analysis of the urban design and amenities that are proposed and possible for this new district.

## II. Summary of Past and Current Plans for the Far West Side

Since the time of the First Regional Plan in 1929, the West Side of Midtown Manhattan has been viewed as an area in transition and an opportunity to complete Midtown Manhattan. Subsequent visions for the district were highlighted in RPA's Second (1968) and Third (1996) Regional Plans, a testament to both the continuing allure of the district and the difficulty of realizing these visions.

More recently, four distinct plans have emerged. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) in 1989, the Manhattan Borough President (MBP) in 2001, and the Hell's Kitchen Neighborhood Association (HKNA) in 2003 have all examined the area. Most importantly, the Department of City Planning (DCP) has proposed a set of major improvements, including new transit access, public spaces and amenities, new residential and commercial development, a major expansion of the Jacob Javits Convention Center, and a new stadium for the New York Jets which would also function as convention space. This plan also achieves the highest overall density for the area – which RPA's research indicates is necessary to support the long-term growth of the metropolitan region. With the City of New York moving aggressively to implement the DCP plan, this is clearly the proposal that has the greatest chance of implementation and the highest need for examination. However, each plan has features that are worthy of consideration. Indeed, they illustrate that there are multiple approaches to the unique design challenges posed by the Far West Side.

Several themes emerge in the history of planning and urban design on the Far West Side which continue to inform planning efforts today. One is the continuing transition, in varying degrees, away from industry to residential and commercial uses – from industry's permanent establishment in RPA's First Regional Plan, to its complete displacement in the Second Regional Plan, to its accommodation in the Third Regional Plan in new, high density mixed-use buildings. In large measure

this idea of accommodating the “best of what's left” seems to be the position taken to varying degrees in the current plans. The MBP's Vision Plan states that “the continued presence of light manufacturing and related uses remains an important element in the land use mix.” The DCP proposal specifically reserves two light manufacturing zones south of 31st Street and retains protections within the Garment District, where most of the area's existing manufacturing is located.

The second major theme is the need to reconcile the impacts of large regional-scale infrastructure investments with the scale of the traditional New York urban fabric. In each of the current proposals, the relationship to infrastructure drives the development scenarios. In RPA's First Regional Plan, designers attempted to make new grade-separated ramps and roadways part of the architecture of the buildings in the district. In the Third Regional Plan the existing ramp infrastructure was celebrated as an architectural event, anticipating its status in several of the current plans. Most important is the relationship between access and development. This was identified most explicitly in the Second Regional Plan, where the Far West Side was literally shaped by a density gradient based on proximity to new transit infrastructure. In the Third Regional Plan, development was shaped by the synergy between a proposed 42nd Street /34th Street light rail loop (a feature of several of the current proposals) and a “Regional Express” rail network that imagined commuter trains passing continuously between New Jersey, Midtown and Connecticut.

The third common theme is rationalizing the relationship between the district and the waterfront. This is expressed in a variety of ways, reflecting the various uses that dominated the waterfront at that time. The First Plan envisioned a ferry terminal. RPA's Lower Hudson Report of the Second Plan reflected the opportunity posed by the movement of maritime and industrial uses away from Manhattan in the 1960s. The Plan called for linking



Fig. 2 – First Plan

public and private investments in a reconfigured elevated highway, parkland, and new development, which was later expressed in the ill-fated Westway proposal. By the time the Third Regional Plan was published, the elevated highway had been replaced, not by fill, but by a narrow Hudson River Park and West Street Boulevard, which reflected the continued evolution of the lower Hudson and Harbor as a new open space amenity for the Region.

### Background: RPA's Three Regional Plans

#### The Regional Plan for New York and Its Environs: The Working Waterfront Meets the City Beautiful

RPA's First Regional Plan produced design studies that reflect both the anticipated continuation of major freight and passenger terminal operations and the desire to impose a beaux arts, European

Fig. 3 – Second Plan



Capital City design aesthetic. Grade-separated movement systems enable freight trains and trucks to move north and south, while the east-west streets terminate at a grand “Terminal Parkway” and Riverside Park Extension. New diagonal roads link parks at the water’s edge to inland destinations. (Figure 2)

### The Second Regional Plan: Movement Systems Move West

In RPA’s Second Regional Plan, the form of the city is driven by a highly rationalized network of multi-level movement systems. Density is driven by access and a new office cluster is created on the Far West Side, focused on the confluence of transit systems along 42nd Street and 10th Avenue. The edge of the city here is part of a continuous band of parks and highway infrastructure around the entire island. (Figure 3)

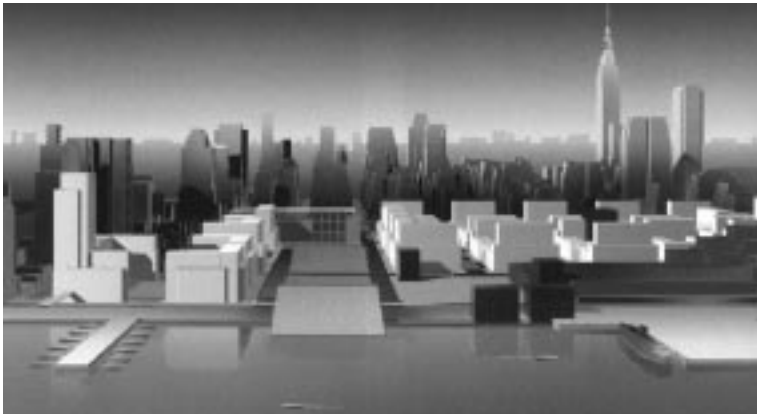


Fig. 4 – Third Plan

### A Region at Risk, The Third Regional Plan: Densify the Grid

In RPA’s Third Regional Plan, the West Side is seen as one of the great opportunities to expand the “Region’s Central Business District.” The design studies do not suggest high-rise development, but a dense horizontal fabric of mid-rise buildings accommodating multiple uses. The revitalized Hudson River and Harbor are seen as a key amenity critical to attracting residents and businesses to the metropolitan region’s core. (Figure 4)

## Current Planning

Regional Plan Association is not the only organization that has looked at Manhattan’s Far West Side over the past century. Public officials, private developers and community groups have all recognized the potential for this area and promoted plans to capitalize on its size and proximity to Midtown. Unfortunately, these plans never proceeded to implementation. The size and scale of the area, and the intense mix of activities, has defeated planners for generations.

For the purposes of this analysis, we looked closely at the City’s current proposal, and also examined three other studies. These plans are subject to a more detailed comparison below, but they can be thought of in the context of five major issues:

- The level and distribution of density throughout the area.
- The total and relative amounts of residential and office development.
- Strategies for accommodating the expansion needs of the Javits Convention Center.

- A football stadium and convention center over the rail yards.
- The relationship of the district to Hudson River Park and the waterfront.

Each of the plans has a somewhat different strategy for promoting and managing development.

### DCP Plan

**Hudson Yards** (Department of City Planning Proposal, 2001)

#### *Make No Small Plans*

In this proposal, three major public actions – extension of the 7 line, re-zoning to allow more development and cre-

ation of a park system and public buildings – are designed to spur intense private investment. A new stadium/convention center complex ties together the 34th Street corridor, the Hudson River Park and a large-scale zone for the future development, projected to be mostly office uses, organized around a new north-south boulevard between 10th and 11th Avenues. The space over the rail yards east of 11th Avenue is used to create a new public space that would be the setting for a cultural or institutional use. The area west of 11th Avenue is reserved for the combination stadium/convention center expansion. Expansion of the Javits Convention Center is also contemplated to the north, with a through passage for the 39th Street corridor.

The plan addresses the current lack of open space in the district by proposing a series of dramatic new parks and public spaces. The open space network links three major components: “10th and a Half Avenue,” the Olympic Plaza and a linear space along 34th Street, fronting the proposed stadium which bridges the highway to connect to the Hudson River Park. In addition, the mid-block zone around the Lincoln Tunnel approaches becomes a new greenway from 33rd to 39th Streets. The #7 Line extension will provide new transit access to the neighborhood, linking with Manhattan’s north-south subway lines at Times Square and Grand Central Terminal.

This is the boldest of the proposals in terms of the scale of the proposed interventions and the extent to which the district is reorganized. Given the lack of development activity in this part of the City and the cost of building over the rail yards, the proposal suggests that development will not take place in an “organic” way, but only as the result of initial large-scale public and private initiatives: the stadium/convention center complex, the #7 line subway extension, a new open space network, and the rezoning to accommodate large scale commercial development designed to pay for the public open space amenities.

This plan is also related to the City’s bid for the 2012 Olympics, with the stadium pegged to host several major events.

**Department of  
City Planning  
(DCP)**



**Hell's Kitchen  
Neighborhood  
Association  
(HKNA)**

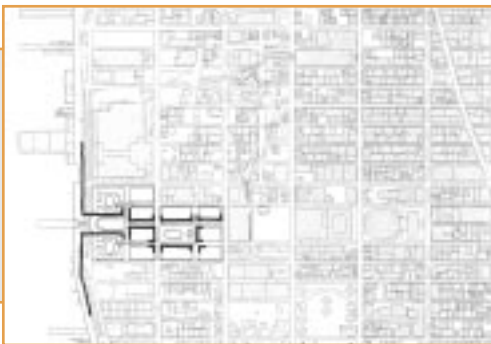
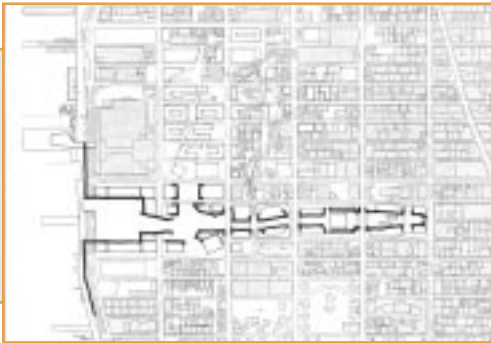


**Manhattan  
Borough  
President  
(MBP)**



**Metropolitan  
Transportation  
Authority  
(MTA)**





## Space allotment comparison by plan (figures in square feet)

	DCP	HKNA	MBP	MTA
<b>Residential</b>	12,600,000	20,000,000	4,200,000	3,578,000
<b>Office</b>	28,000,000	18,200,000	2,500,000	8,290,000
<b>Retail</b>	600,000	500,000	500,000	-
<b>Hotel</b>	1,500,000	1,240,000	-	632,000

### Other Design Proposals

#### Caemmerer West Side Yard Master Plan (MTA, 1989)

##### *Rockefeller Center on the Hudson*

This plan reintroduces the typical street grid over the rail yards and organizes buildings symmetrically around two new public parks. One park, just east of 11th Avenue, is surrounded by office buildings. The other, closest to the river, is surrounded by residential buildings, leveraging physical and visual access to the one new major amenity that was planned at the time, the Hudson River Park. A new shuttle train below 33rd Street linked the new development to Penn Station, but did not provide access from the East Side. Although this plan is presented in the context of a larger planning framework, the physical planning was confined to the area over the yards west of 10th Avenue. Thus, this plan was not so much about the transformation of the Far West Side as a district as it was about exploiting the immediate development potential of the vacant land over the rail yards.

#### A Vision for the West Side Rail Yards (Manhattan Borough President, 2001)

##### *On the Tracks: Build Two New Centers and Grow the Neighborhood*

Similar to the MTA plan, the plan reintroduces a street and block pattern over the yards and places most of the future development symmetrically around two new public spaces. Residential uses are on the new blocks west of 11th Avenue, stepping down in scale to preserve views and to respect the scale of Hudson River Park. Office buildings are placed over the yards east of 11th Avenue, where they are closer to Penn Station. In order to preserve the scale and character of the neighborhood to the north, the plan puts most of the development over the yards and along the 34th Street corridor and suggests new

infill development which attempts to reinforce the existing neighborhood patterns. In addition to the two new plazas, the open space network includes connecting to a redesigned Javits Plaza and creating a new park at the eastern end of the platform over the yards which engages the High Line “greenway” and links to Hudson River Park.

Because the MBP plan does not include a stadium and has floor area ratios (FARs) in the 7-8 range the supporting transportation infrastructure is not reliant on the extension of the #7 subway line. The transportation plan mentions three elements that by themselves or in combination can serve the area: buses, light rail, or the subway. The Javits Center expansion would take place to the north and would be designed to maintain the 39th Street corridor to the River.

This plan presents a vision in which the exploitation of the big development opportunity – the rail yards – is balanced with, and symbiotic with, a process of incremental, context-driven development that aims to build on the existing pattern. It does not achieve the development densities of the other plans, or the density levels that RPA believes would be desirable for the neighborhood in the long-term.

#### The Hell's Kitchen Neighborhood Association's (HKNA) Plan for Rezoning Hell's Kitchen/ Hudson Yards (2003):

##### *Lateral Thinking: Build the East-West Corridor and Preserve the Neighborhood*

This proposal has to be seen in the context of the City's proposal as it is first and foremost a response to it. It is currently being studied as an alternative in the Environmental Impact Statement process. As with the Borough President's proposal, the goal is to shift most of the development to the 32nd Street/34th Street corridor in order to preserve the area north of 34th Street. For the purposes of the EIS

process, HKNA described a new “predominantly commercial zone” west of a new north-south boulevard between 10th and 11th Avenues, similar to the City's but smaller in scale with lower FARs, and a “Large Scale Plan” area that extends to 35th Street. HKNA's preferred alternative omits the mid-block boulevard and creates a smaller-scale pedestrian corridor through new mid-rise blocks between 10th and 11th avenues, linking several smaller open spaces including a re-designed Javits Park. The space over the rail yards east of 11th Avenue is, as in the City's plan, a large public space although in this case it is bounded by predominantly new commercial development, in addition to retail, restaurants, cinemas and a cultural facility. The space west of 11th Avenue is, also as in the City's plan, reserved for convention center expansion, but rather than placing the stadium over the yards, a new elevated public park ringed by new predominantly commercial, retail and residential development is proposed.

The open space network includes a new north-south pedestrian connection and, as in the City's plan, a greenway around the Lincoln Tunnel approaches between 9th and 10th avenues. But the major open space gesture is the axis of movement and development along the 32nd Street “super block” corridor, starting at a redeveloped Madison Square Garden site and continuing through the new open spaces over the rail yards to the Hudson River Park. Transportation improvements include a 33rd Street shuttle (similar to the one in the 1989 MTA Plan) that can connect to the #7 extension in a future phase, and a new light rail loop.

In some ways, this plan creates value by merging two of the strategies described earlier. As in the Borough President's proposal, the essential character of the neighborhood is accepted as the platform for incremental, context-driven redevelopment. At the same time, as in the City's proposal, the plan acknowledges the role of initial large-scale public and private investment in the rail yards as the source of most of the future investment. The major new park created over the convention center is the principal amenity that supports this strategy.



## II. Urban Design Analysis

This chapter analyzes in more detail the City's plan and three alternative visions for the Far West Side.



Fig. 5 – Lincoln Tunnel approaches

### Six Challenges for Successful Redevelopment of the Far West Side

Any urban design proposal for the Far West Side will have to deal in some way with certain realities that are part of this place: the fact that 30% of the land is consumed by transportation infrastructure of some kind; that the existing built pattern is an idiosyncratic mix of buildings of all types, uses and scales; and that there are significant changes in topography around the 34th street corridor between 11th Avenue and the River.

There are several other dimensions of the larger planning framework that will shape this area. It is for the most part bracketed to the north and south by the 42nd Street and 34th Street corridors. There is a corridor of “super-block scale” developments between 31st and 33rd Streets from 7th Avenue to the Hudson River which includes the area over the rail yards. Perhaps most importantly, many of the cross streets do not extend to the water, a function both of the scale of the Convention Center, the super-block corridor and the rail yards.

#### 1. Keep on Moving: Transportation Infrastructure as Landscape

In the current proposals, as in RPA's Third Regional Plan, plans for the transportation

infrastructure reflect the political and economic realities of large scale urban redevelopment. The basic heavy infrastructure of ramps and terminals remain and are celebrated as unique architectural elements of the urban landscape. Both the City's proposal and the HKNA response

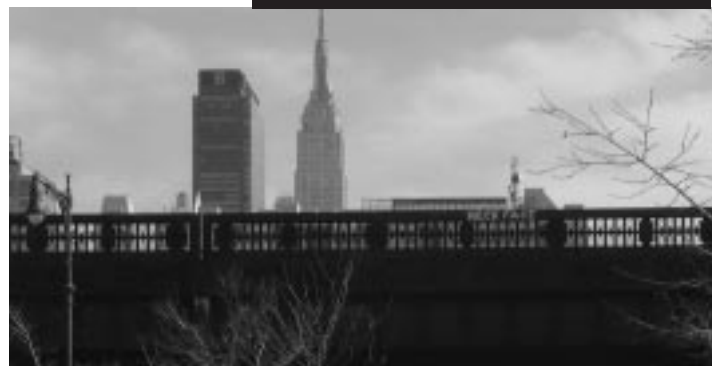
create a greenway in the large mid-block zone where the Lincoln Tunnel approaches cut through the neighborhood. The illustrative plans suggest aggressive greening of the left-over spaces around the ramps which presumably would be painted, lighted and generally celebrated as industrial artifacts. The Manhattan Borough President's proposal is less explicit about the use of the infrastructure for creating greenways, but instead suggests that the spaces below the ramps be used for bus storage and facilities for the storage and maintenance of a proposed light rail system.

Finally, there is the High Line, which after years of controversy over whether it should remain or be torn down is now being planned as a prospective greenway. Each of the current proposals (with the exception of the MTA study) link to the High Line in some fashion. For instance, the Borough President's plan uses the space under the High Line trestle along 30th Street for open space markets and other community and retail functions. Where the High Line runs adjacent to the West Side Highway, the greenway becomes part of a

larger park on the western edge of the platform over the tracks, connecting the High Line to the Hudson River Park. The City plan connects the green space created by 10th and a Half Avenue to the High Line at 32nd Street, offering the potential for an unbroken greenway from 42nd Street to Gansevoort Street, and from the Hudson River to the Farley Building.

Faced with the enormous capital investment required to radically reconfigure the ramps and cuts associated with the bus terminal and the tunnel entrances, the strategy of celebrating this infrastructure as part of the unique landscape of this place is a logical strategy. It is potentially part of the “branding” of this area—of making it attractive by promoting it as a unique place within the larger fabric of Midtown. At the same time, an honest assessment would acknowledge that this infrastructure is a burden to attracting new investment. Its function, after all, will not change. Much of it will remain a conduit for large volumes of traffic in the form of cars, trucks and many buses. In addition, while the appearance of the ramps can certainly be improved, their scale and configuration is still intimidating, dividing the fabric and creating crossing points that disrupt the pedestrian experience. In addition, there are not a lot of successful precedents for using the space below these kinds of structures. The space below the Park Avenue rail viaduct in the area of 120th Street has been used for a market – la Marquette – that has had only a mixed record of success. There are several streets with elevated subways that are successful, including Bay Ridge in Brooklyn. In the area around South Street Seaport, the raised highway has not prevented the development of the area as a tourist destination. In all of these cases,

Fig. 6 – The High Line



however, the structure is linear and part of the basic orientation of the grid, making the leap from trestle to “arcade” easier to accomplish.

## 2. The Kitchen Sink: A Strange Brew of Activities in Hell’s Kitchen South

As a transitional area, Hell’s Kitchen South is an incredibly diverse landscape. Much of the district is underutilized, with large areas devoted to surface parking, one story industrial uses and a “spaghetti” of infrastructure systems. Residential buildings range from large floorplate, turn-of-the-century apartment blocks, to more recent point towers, to clusters of four and five story tenements. Industrial building types include the large bus terminal and storage facilities, older loft factories and single story industrial “pancake” buildings. Commercial buildings include several contemporary low-rise “flex” type industrial buildings as well as several older loft type buildings adaptively reused for design and technology-based industries. And the challenge is that there are few areas of consolidated land use, resulting in a jumble of all these ingredients.

Depending on how one believes long term development pressures will play out, the current plans either accept or celebrate this peculiar but extremely interesting landscape. None of the proposals call for the area to be completely reconfigured. The City’s proposal is the most ambitious, suggesting that the entire area between 10th and 11th Avenues, from 34th Street to 42nd Street would be the site for very high density commercial and residential development around a new boulevard. However, within the core of the area between 8th and 10th avenues, infill development is contemplated at a lower density – “Predominantly Residential with Commercial Base.”

While the HKNA alternative conceptual zoning map suggests a roughly comparable strategy in the core of the area, the neighborhood association has been aggressive about stating their desire to preserve the scale and character of the existing neighborhood. This is why both the HKNA and Borough President plans propose less density overall and put the most intensive development over the rail yards. Others argue that the existing uses and neighborhood character unravel as one moves west from 9th Avenue.

Managing change in this strange landscape is a challenge on several levels. There are a host of issues that need to be addressed having to do with the compatibility of industrial, transportation and residential uses, including noise and odor impacts, hours of operation, truck deliveries and goods movement, building scale and character. There are certainly precedents for creative ways of managing these

unfriendly structures that are not sympathetic to the special mixed-use pattern captured in the core of the area. Unlike some older industrial districts that are populated with extraordinary turn-of-the-century loft buildings with large windows and elaborate architectural detail, many of the industrial structures here are characterless one-story boxes that are difficult to make part of a pedestrian environment.



Fig. 7 – Mixed uses in Hell’s Kitchen South

conflicts – from performance standards to innovative mixed-use building types. There are already five special industrial/residential mixed-use districts in New York City that try to achieve this kind of mix. But for the most part the goal in these districts is to preserve and manage what is there, not to promote a new kind of district in which commercial and residential uses grow enormously in the midst of continued industrial uses.

Assuming the technical challenges can be met, there is a larger problem of image, a public relations challenge that is nevertheless a key to successful planning. Advocates for neighborhood investment know the power of “branding,” creating the familiar alphabet soup of acronyms – SoHo, NoHo, Dumbo. These advocates try to exploit the interest that people have in places with a distinct and unique identity. This is the basis for “place-making.”

What would that be for the Far West Side? The one handle for the area now – Hell’s Kitchen – is a threatening one. The boundaries are blurry at best, and the most identifiable landmarks – the Port Authority Bus Terminal and the Javits Convention Center – are over-sized, architecturally undistinguished, pedestrian-

Attempts to celebrate the ramps and road infrastructure may help, but do not create a positive district-wide identity.

## 3. Ramp it Up: Topography on the Far West Side

The topography in the area is quite dramatic. While there are several local variations in topography, overall the streets slope up to meet the high elevation of 11th Avenue as it crosses the rail yards between 30th and 36th Streets. Thirty-fourth Street west of 11th Avenue slopes down to the West Side Highway. Eleventh Avenue slopes down to 30th Street, which is roughly ten feet higher than the West Side Highway.

The fact that the platform over the rail yards is at the higher elevation has obvious benefits and disadvantages. The good news is that new developments over the yards can be linked to 11th Avenue. New open spaces can be extended over the highway to link to the Hudson River Park. All of the current proposals take advantage of this to bridge the highway. The Borough President’s plan creates a park at the edge of the platform before crossing the highway. The MTA and Borough President’s plans create new streets over the yards that connect to 11th Avenue. The DCP



**Fig. 8 – Corridor to the CBD**

plan and HKNA alternative create major new open spaces that are accessed from 11th Avenue.

There are several challenges, however. First, the change in grade means that any new street and block network over the yards cannot link to 34th and 31st streets west of 11th Avenue. A new grid can only connect to 11th Avenue. Second, the platform creates a huge blank wall along the other three frontages. Along the West Side Highway this is not much of a problem since the Hudson River Park is on the other side of the highway. But on the side streets it is an issue and each of the proposals suggests a way of dealing with it. The Borough President’s plan uses the High Line as a kind of arcade with activities below it along the 30th Street frontage. Along 34th Street, the City’s proposal creates a linear park at the higher elevation of 11th Avenue before crossing the highway with a deck to the Hudson River Park and connected to the High Line.

Overall, the fact that at-grade access to the space above the rail yards is limited to one edge, 11th Avenue, is an obstacle to physically linking the developments over the yards to a larger neighborhood revitalization strategy. The Borough President’s

plan tries to do this with a new “11th Avenue Boulevard.” HKNA also creates a north-south extension from the yards. The City’s proposal creates a major new boulevard extending north from the proposed stadium/convention center and Olympic Plaza site.

If the one real advantage to the topography is the ability to connect to Hudson River Park, then some combination of strategies should be considered, such as creating park spaces that extend well onto the western edge of the platform as the MBP plan does and extending the 34th Street corridor as a linear park across the highway as in the DCP plan.

#### 4. Two for the Road: The 34th and 42nd Street Corridors

Whatever cross streets are extended to the water, the 34th and 42nd Street corridors obviously remain the most significant links because of their historic significance as major cross-town connectors and transit corridors and because they intersect with Broadway at Herald Square and Times Square, respectively.

In varying degrees, these corridors are acknowledged in the current plans. The conceptual zoning maps by both HKNA and the City suggest a residential and commercial zone straddling 42nd Street and 34th Street (although the HKNA alternative plan reduces the FAR of this corridor to 12 from the City’s 13). The MBP plan also calls for “Mixed Use Corridor/Retail at Grade,” with no specific FAR. Both the HKNA and MBP plans avoid commercial development on 42nd Street, which limits their opportunity for organic growth west from Times Square. The district-wide planning framework diagrams that were done for the MTA’s study identify 42nd and 34th Street as “corridors of development.”

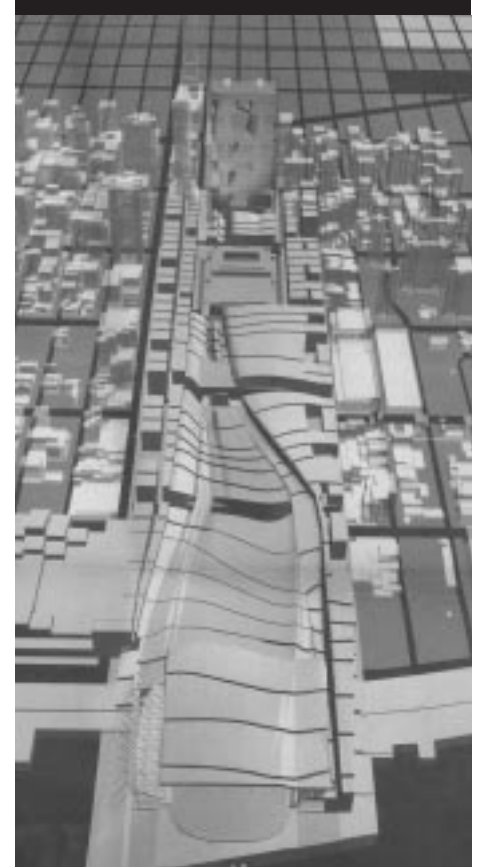
Emphasizing the role of these corridors in organizing the district has several advantages. First, it is a strategy that is most sympathetic to an investment scenario in which development moves progressively from east to west. Office development in particular is far more likely to proceed organically along these major corridors, continuing the gradual westward expansion of Midtown that has been underway for decades.

Secondly, the corridors can help define this area. They can create discrete edges for an area within which there can be a coherent design strategy for streetscape elements, urban landscape and other design elements. The more coherent the corridors are, the more the neighborhood can afford to remain idiosyncratic and messy.

#### 5. Lateral Thinking: Super-block Row

Since the building of the original Penn Station and the rail yards beyond, 32nd Street has been discontinuous, creating a series of 2-block wide super-blocks from 7th Avenue to 10th Avenue and a 3-block wide super-block at the yards from 10th Avenue to the River. Over the years, the large blocks have been exploited to build large-scale developments including (from east to west): the Madison Square Garden/Penn Station complex from 7th Avenue to 8th Avenue; the Farley Post Office Building from 8th Avenue to 9th Avenue, which will become the new Moynihan Railway Station; the rail yards west of 9th, considered a potential site for a new Madison Square Garden; the West

**Fig. 9 – Super-block Row (Eisenman Arch.)**



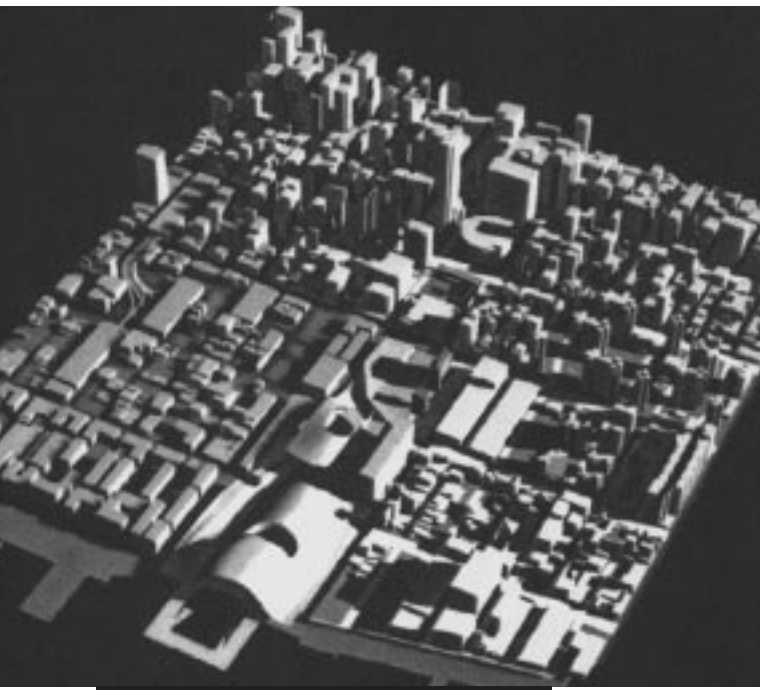


Fig. 10 – U.N. Studio

Yards Building on 10th Avenue; and the rail yards between 10th Avenue and the River.

Interestingly, the idea of treating this swath of the city from 7th Avenue to the water as a new linear district with its own unified image was at the core of many of the proposals that emerged from a Far West Side Design Competition sponsored by the Canadian Centre for Architecture in 1999. (Figure 9) It is a compelling idea that capitalizes on the scale of the super blocks and the monumental scale of the developments that have been proposed there (including the stadium) to solve the fundamental design challenge of linking the city's edge to Midtown.

Among the recent plans the HKNA proposal makes this zone of super-blocks the centerpiece of the design. The concept model suggests a chain of highly distinctive commercial buildings between 7th and 9th avenues, and then continues this pattern of large-scale development over the rail yards to the river. The illustrative plan reveals a new west-bound pedestrian way linking Penn Station and the new development with a series of public spaces leading to the Hudson River. The pedestrian way is a reintroduced 32nd street which is open-air except for two shopping passages that re-connect the street through the Moynihan Railway Station and the West Yards building at

10th Avenue. Making this feel like a coherent experience is difficult but not impossible. It is analogous to the pedestrian experience that leads from the terminus of Park Avenue at 45th Street to 42nd Street, a route that includes both the great hall of Grand Central Station and the somewhat ordinary ground floor experience through the office buildings, although this is a much shorter journey. Rockefeller Center is another example of robust pedestrian connection on several levels through a mid-

block, although this is not really the same scale and Rockefeller Center was designed by one hand and built in one time for one owner – a significant difference from the situation on 32nd Street.

The other plans acknowledge the super-block corridor without making it the center piece of the design. The MBP proposal identifies the potential new Madison Square Garden Site on the air rights of the rail yard west of 9th Avenue and organizes the development along the 32nd Street axis, as does the MTA plan. HKNA suggests a new Madison Square Garden over the West Yards at 9th Avenue. (Madison Square Garden has yet to decide whether it will pursue a new facility). The City's plan continues the large scale pattern to the river in the form of the proposed convention center/stadium complex.

The approach taken to this zone of super-blocks is more than a formal exercise. It reveals some fundamental differences in the redevelopment strategies in each of the proposals. By extending a street grid over the yards and turning development over to an incremental scale of growth, driven by the private market, the MBP proposal rejects this large-scale approach to urban redevelopment. Both the DCP and HKNA proposals, on the other hand, exploit the idea that this is a corridor for initial large-scale public investment where the extension of a street grid has only limited utility. This is a strong argument and

convention center expansion to the south makes sense for that reason. The question then becomes whether a stadium/convention facility also makes sense, as in the City's proposal, or whether there is sufficient developable area around the edges of the convention center to support neighborhood revitalization and a major new public park, as in the HKNA proposal.

Finally, one of the most intriguing ideas, but one apparently beyond the scope of the current discussion, is to move the convention center in its entirety to the super-block corridor, and restore the street and block system, with its many connections to the waterfront and diverse development opportunities, in the blocks occupied by the existing convention center. (Figure 10)

## 6. Take Me to the River

Here, as in so many places around the harbor, the overriding goal is to re-link the City to the water's edge as the single biggest amenity that can enhance the urban experience as well as drive new development. Unfortunately, as elsewhere, the critical obstacle is a highway that separates the district from the perimeter of the island as well as former and in some cases still active industrial uses. This is all the more challenging here because the Javits Convention Center and the three block super-block of the rail yards allow only three of the twelve streets between 30th Street and 42nd Street to continue to the water. The question is, will new large scale development at the edge enhance or further restrict connections to the waterfront?

It is important to understand that the Hudson River Park in this location is bracketed by two areas of intensive use and access. Between 39th and 45th streets are the docks for ferries, tour boats and the Intrepid Sea Air and Space Museum. Forty-second Street is the major east-west corridor for tourist traffic from mid-town. South of 30th Street are the Chelsea Piers, a popular recreation venue, with strong visual and transit connections to the densely populated Chelsea neighborhood. But between 30th and 38th streets, the Hudson River Park narrows, with only one standing pier and considerable space on the bulkhead devoted to the heliport. Across West Street is the blank rear façade of the Javits Center. This geog-



**Fig. 11 – Hudson River Park at Javits Convention Center**

raphy offers a series of opportunities and constraints for making upland connections to Hudson River Park:

- Pier 76 is planned as half commercial and half parkland, with a hotel or some other active use sharing space with a new park. The connection through the Javits Center is logical, especially since the structure of the Convention Center was originally designed to receive such a bridge. Both the MBP and HKNA plans propose a new bridge approximately in alignment with the center hall and the center of Pier 76.

- The 39th Street corridor is extremely important to the community and is also a major route for access to the City's new 39th Street ferry landings in the Hudson River Park. All of the proposals respect the role of the 40th Street corridor as one of the important connecting corridors and all maintain it in some form. Because the HKNA plan does not entertain a northerly expansion of the Convention Center, the 39th Street corridor can continue to the water as a true street. The MBP and City plans, which expand the convention center to the north, suggest some kind of public connection extending through the building to the water along the 39th Street alignment. In addition, the City proposal for the northerly expansion of the convention center includes an upper level connection with a bridge over the highway at the 39th Street corridor.

If the convention center expands to the north, this should be more than a pedestrian way through the building, but rather a major architectural feature of the new design. This is not without precedent. The Seattle Convention Center expansion includes a major arcade and bridges

between the old and new halls allowing Pike Street, an important neighborhood thoroughfare, to pass through. (Figure 12)

As for the streets that dead end in front of the Convention Center at 11th Avenue, the strategy is to engage the ends of these streets with some new north-south intervention. In the case of the City's Plan and the HKNA alternative, the new "10th and a Half" Avenue Boulevard accomplishes this, an idea that was also anticipated in the 3rd Plan design studies. The MBP plan engages the ends of these streets by creating a new boulevard along 11th Avenue tied to a redesigned Javits Park at 34th Street.

- The 34th Street corridor and the super-blocks over the tracks are really where waterfront access and redevelopment strategies come together. All of the proposals exploit the change in grade from 11th Avenue to 12th Avenue in some way. The MBP plan draws the park into the redevelopment area by creating a park across the entire western edge of the platform, where it can engage the High Line Greenway. The park creates the value to support the residential buildings in this part of the plan. However, because the plan creates a symmetrical network of new streets and blocks, the bridge to the park is at the end of a re-mapped 32nd Street corridor and not at the more important 34th Street corridor. Also, by restricting convention center expansion to the north, another cross-street, 40th Street, would have to be closed off and the 39th Street connection would have to be a major architectural component of the expansion.

The City's proposal has a stronger relationship to the 34th Street corridor. It builds a linear park in front of the proposed convention center/stadium expansion that

extends from 11th Avenue across the highway, widens Hudson River Park at one of its narrowest points, and creates a unique destination. Having the deck here should help activate the park. However, the stadium structure is extremely large, and may loom over the park. Opponents argue that the stadium may benefit from a waterfront location, but question how much the waterfront benefits from having the stadium.

The HKNA proposal has some of the advantages and disadvantages of each. By restricting convention center expansion to the south, all of the remaining cross streets to the north are left open, including an uncompromised connection at 39th Street. By building a major park on the roof of the convention center expansion at the rail yards, it attempts, as the MBP plan does, to draw the Hudson River Park across the highway. By lining the northern and southern edges of the convention center with a zone of new buildings, the plan can also put some development next to the Hudson River Park. However, there are several issues. First, it is not clear how much development can really be adjacent to the Hudson River Park. Residential uses would better animate the Hudson River Park as well as the new proposed park over the convention center. Second, the new park will be 60 feet above the Hudson River Park. Even if this transition is terraced, it is a huge elevation change. Finally, there is a question as to whether one large park in this location adds more value than a more distributed network of smaller parks scattered throughout the neighborhood.



**Fig. 12 – Pike Street Corridor at the Seattle Convention Center**



**Fig. 13 – Proposed Convention Center Stadium Corridor**

## IV. Stadium Analysis

The proposed New York Sports and Convention Center, a football stadium and convention facility, occupies the prime piece of waterfront real estate in the Hudson Yards area. In many ways, this site is the critical linchpin for each of the proposals. As such, it is appropriate to study the potential impact of this facility in more detail. Several areas of concern have been raised regarding the stadium. These include the economic impacts, transportation and environmental concerns, opportunity costs and urban design issues. There is voluminous academic literature<sup>1</sup> on the economic impact of new stadiums, most of which conclude that contributions to city and regional economies rarely justify the substantial public subsidies that these projects typically command. In this paper, we focus on the issues of alternative uses and urban design. More specifically, how would the proposed stadium fit into the urban fabric of a redeveloped Far West Side, and is this the best use of some of the most important property in the redevelopment district?

### What Can We Learn From Other Cities?

In order to attempt an analysis of the proposed facility, which has undergone several revisions in its design and program over the past year, this paper makes a brief survey of other comparable sports facilities in North America. For the purposes of this analysis, we have focused on the facilities that stadium proponents note as successful models.

While proponents include several baseball stadiums among these models, we have

omitted most of them as not comparable, given the vast differences between football and baseball stadiums in North America. Briefly, these can be categorized as shape, scale and usage. First and foremost, modern baseball stadiums are designed specifically for the sport, which allows a flexibility of dimensions not applicable to football. For example, baseball stadiums in Baltimore, Denver and San Francisco have been shaped and designed to fit seamlessly into their surroundings, be they man-made or natural. Second, baseball stadiums tend to be much shorter, and thus more compatible with street life and low-to-medium-rise neighbors, which is best illustrated by historic stadiums, such as Chicago's Wrigley Field. Football stadiums tend to be more hulking structures, a condition further exacerbated in this case, as the rail yards don't allow the playing field to be sunk below street level. Finally, baseball stadiums are used more frequently and by a larger percentage of the population than football stadiums. With 81 guaranteed games each year, generally obtainable tickets and more relatively inexpensive seats, baseball stadiums tend to be active places that are accessible to a sizable percentage of the community. If successful, the convention uses in the facility may bring additional activity to the facility, although it's not clear to what extent.

### Case Studies

Four urban stadiums have been cited as successful models for the NY Sports and Convention Center.

None of the cases presented are completely comparable to the Far West Side, and should not be the final word on whether or not the sports facility proposed for Manhattan meets the criteria listed above. By its nature, Manhattan is different from

any other U.S. city, a fact that can be cited as evidence either for or against a stadium. And there are very few examples of other global cities siting a similar facility in such a dense area. Still, an examination of these cases should provide lessons for what has or has not worked, and demonstrate how much and what type of evidence is needed by both proponents and opponents.

### Seattle

Seattle's South Downtown area boasts adjacent baseball and football stadiums, both completed in the past five years. The complex also includes a 325,000 square foot exhibition center and three large parking facilities, which seems indicative of a trend toward clustering these activities.

**Primary access:** The stadium complex is situated just a few blocks west of the conjunction of two major expressways (90 and 5), and another highway runs between the stadium and the waterfront several blocks to the west. The complex contains plenty of parking, but is also accessible by commuter rail, bus, ferry and pedestrian bridges.

**Surrounding activities:** The stadium complex is bordered by distinct neighborhoods on three sides. To the north is the Pioneer Square historic district, characterized by specialty retail shops, restaurants and other tourist-related activities. To the east is the International District, a largely residential area that acts as a magnet for the region's Asian-American community. Finally, an intensive industrial district lies to the south, home to 4,000 businesses and 70,000 employees. Three low-to-mid-rise office buildings have been constructed in the vicinity in the past several years, each with ground-floor retail.

**Fig. 14 – Seattle**



**Waterfront access:** The stadium area is separated from the waterfront by an elevated highway that is the main obstacle to waterfront access. The stadium development has neither impeded nor improved access.

Seattle's new sports and convention center has brought new activity to the area and is located in an urban setting. However, its proximity to several major highways and its concentration of on-site parking make it more akin to many of the country's suburban stadiums. While three office buildings have been constructed in the area, it has not sparked significant commercial or residential growth in the immediate area.

### Baltimore

Baltimore's Inner Harbor is frequently cited as a model for stadium development revitalizing an urban community. As in Seattle, the Inner Harbor is home to both the city's football and baseball stadiums. Indeed, Oriole Park at Camden Yards, the baseball facility, is a terrific example of contextual development, integrated into a pre-existing warehouse that now houses shops and restaurants. The activity in the Harbor area has revitalized the neighboring area, although the focus is on activities catering to tourists and sports fans, such as bars and souvenir shops. The football stadium – M & T Bank Stadium – lies across a highway from the baseball stadium, but has little in common with Oriole Park. It is a fairly standard, rectangular facility.

**Primary access:** The football stadium sits just off of Route 95, the main auto artery along the Eastern seaboard. It is surrounded by surface parking.

**Surrounding activities:** The football stadium is walled off from the downtown area by parking lots and major highway infrastructure. The tourist activities of the Inner Harbor continue to thrive on one side, but no new commercial or residential development is anticipated or planned in its vicinity.

**Waterfront:** While part of the Inner Harbor development, the stadium neither impedes nor provides access to the waterfront.

The M & T Bank Stadium is an integral part of a very attractive redevelopment



Fig. 15 – Baltimore

strategy for a large part of the city. However, it has more in common with its suburban counterparts than the baseball stadium that shares the Camden Yards complex. Unlike the baseball stadium, the football stadium is treated as more of a detriment than an amenity, and thus barricaded from the areas that have thrived along with the baseball stadium.

### St. Louis

St. Louis' Edward Jones Dome has been cited as a model of a successful urban multi-use facility. The Dome is connected to the city's convention center and provides additional exhibition space for it. While the Rams football team is feverishly popular in St. Louis, and the contiguous floor space of the stadium and convention center have allowed the convention center to host larger events, the stadium's role as urban amenity and neighbor is more dubious.

**Primary access:** The Dome is bordered to the East by I-70, one of the Midwest's major auto arteries. The Dome is also easily accessible from Highway 40/ I-64, which exits in the downtown area. There is plenty of surface parking and garages nearby to accommodate a largely auto-based crowd. The Metrolink light rail system is also a popular choice for game day travel, which has a stop at the Convention Center.

**Surrounding activities:** In addition to the highway to the east and convention center to the west, the Dome is bordered immediately to the south by a failed urban shopping mall and the rest of downtown St. Louis, and to the west by an up and coming hip loft neighborhood for young professionals and artists. To the north, however, is one of the city's lower-income

communities. Rather than connecting this neighborhood to the rest of the city, the stadium and convention center – by design or coincidence – act as a barrier separating the two.

**Waterfront access:** While the relation between the Dome and the St. Louis waterfront is not evident because of the barrier created by I-70 to its east, the waterfront district known as Laclede's Landing can be accessed by a walk one block south and four blocks to the east of the dome.

This project successfully creates the kind of synergy between the stadium and the convention center that is the goal on the Far West Side. However, it has excellent access from a nearby expressway and is not really integrated into the urban fabric.



Fig. 16 – St. Louis

In fact, in some ways the stadium has created a wall that further separates the city's poorer neighborhoods from the city's economic activity and so far it has not created a magnet for intense commercial or residential development. Rather than act as a hub of activity, the Edward Jones Dome seems more to be nestled in the quietest corner of the City. On days when no event takes place at the stadium, the area around it is barren and deserted. While the complex may provide needed economic activity, it has shown no signs of providing a magnet for intense commercial or residential development.

### Toronto

While Toronto's SkyDome is used primarily as a baseball stadium for the Blue Jays, it is a multi-use facility that proponents have cited as closest to the West Side example, and is thus worthy of considera-

tion here. In addition to a 50,000 seat baseball stadium, SkyDome can be configured as a 53,000 seat football stadium for the local Canadian Football League team and seats up to 65,000 for other events. The facility also includes a Hard Rock Café and hotel that overlooks the playing field. In all, SkyDome plays host to a remarkable 300+ events annually. Its retractable roof was the first of its kind and has become something of an icon. In combination with the adjacent CN Tower and hockey/basketball arena, the SkyDome is clearly a top tourist destination.

**Primary access:** SkyDome sits a few short blocks from the Gardiner Expressway, the main auto access to the south end of Toronto. It is also adjacent to Canada's busiest transit hub, however, and easily accessible via several forms of mass transit.

**Surrounding activities:** SkyDome was recently joined by a new arena for the city's basketball and hockey teams. In addition to sports and tourism related activities that have sprouted in the immediate area, in recent years several new residential high-rise towers have been completed in the area. A massive 21-tower, 8,000-unit residential development is expected to be completed in the area by the end of the decade.

**Waterfront access:** The success of SkyDome and the surrounding attractions have revitalized the area of the city nearest to the waterfront, but have not markedly improved waterfront access. Some observers also express concern that impending high-rise development will actually wall off the city from the waterfront.

In some ways, SkyDome is an ideal urban sports facility. It is in use almost constantly, attracts both locals and tourists, is accessible by mass transit and has helped revitalize a portion of the downtown area that had previously acted as a barrier to waterfront access. Residential development is now booming, although more than a decade after local officials anticipated. The hope that the central business district would expand into this area never panned out, although this can be attributed, at least in part, to a downturn in the region's economy.

If the SkyDome is the model for a stadium on the far West Side then several challenges would need to be addressed. The site for the SkyDome enables the street walls (which are largely blank) to be lower even though the dome itself reaches to more than 300 feet. Adjacent residential development has taken the form of high-rise spikes, buildings with many small units that cater mainly to young, transient professionals.



Fig. 17 – Toronto

The combination of the stadium superblock and neighboring high-rise residential towers has caused some critics to raise questions about the pedestrian experience. Also, the buildings and the sports facilities are not sufficiently integrated into the rest of the urban fabric and as a result street-level retail is aimed largely at tourists and sports fans. As a result, SkyDome has not acted as a magnet for intense commercial development. It has provided the core of a very successful tourism and entertainment sector, but not the basis of the development necessary to meet expectations on the Far West Side.

**The case studies suggest that the biggest issue, beyond the transportation and urban design challenges, is what kind of development these projects can sponsor in their surroundings. When clustered together, stadiums and convention centers often make for a successful tourist corridor but as yet, they have not shown the ability to sponsor development of intensive mixed-use districts. There is little evidence of such facilities thriving in districts as dense as the one proposed for the Far West Side.**

## Benchmark Criteria for a Stadium on the Far West Side

For the new facility to succeed, it must meet several criteria. Perhaps the two most important considerations relate to activities on days when there aren't football games at the stadium, and how the stadium will attract the vibrant mix of activities and development contemplated for the entire district.

For these activities to thrive, the district will need a tapestry of office space, housing, retail and nightlife woven together by a network of world-class public spaces. The City has identified the stadium as critical to the success of the entire district. This site must be a magnet for intense commercial and residential development throughout the district. To achieve these goals, public debate and independent review is necessary to provide satisfactory answers to the following questions before deciding if the stadium is the highest and best use of scarce Manhattan waterfront real estate:

- Will the facility significantly promote the development of 40 million square feet of new development needed to support the City's ambitious Hudson Yards plan?

Our research suggests that no other football stadium in America has succeeded in promoting the level of complementary development proposed in these plans. While there are many unique aspects of Manhattan and the Far West Side, there are still strong concerns that the stadium could deter, rather than attract, the large-scale redevelopment that the district needs. While the Jets and the City are clearly focused on designing the stadium so as to augment nearby streets and public spaces, Toronto's experience with the SkyDome suggests just how difficult it would be to enliven these spaces when the stadium is not in use.

- Will the facility succeed as a convention center, providing useful space to the Javits Center?

The eventual success of this facility will depend far more on how well it serves as a complementary facility to the Javits Center than as a football stadium. If the facility fails to attract major new convention shows, New York will have missed another opportunity to create a world-class conven-



tion center. More than simply succeeding as a convention center, advocates for the current proposal must provide evidence that the dual-use facility provides the best way to expand the Javits Center in addition to the northern expansion. They must demonstrate how a southern Javits expansion without the stadium, or other complementary use, would not be better for the convention corridor and the city's economy.

- What impact will stadium events have on the existing and planned surrounding communities and the new district's prime amenity – the Hudson River waterfront?

- Will Hudson River Park be overrun with fans on event days?

- Will 70% of Jets fans arrive via mass transit, as the team has suggested, or will the number be closer to the 40% that Madison Square Garden reports use transit for its weekend events?

- What traffic impact will stadium events have on Broadway and other major tourist attractions throughout the city?

How the stadium performs with regards to these issues will help determine whether it is a benefit or detriment to the Far West Side, New York City, and the Tri-State Metropolitan Region.

## V. Conclusion

The City's ambitious plans for the Far West Side and each of the other design studies discussed in this report share certain design strategies which will likely remain part of the urban design framework for this area:

- The greening of the road and rail ramps and cuts.

- The celebration of the existing transportation infrastructure as urban artifact.

- Linkages to the Hudson River Park at 39th Street and at the raised deck over the rail yards.

- Pedestrian connections through the super-block corridor south of 33rd Street.

- Linking the ends of the streets that dead end at the Convention Center.

- Preserving the particular character of this place.

The designs vary in the way they try to accomplish these goals. For example, they each engage the Hudson River park in a different way - with a deck over the highway and linear park along 34th Street (DCP); a new park at the western edge of the deck (MBP); or a set of terraces from a park on the roof of the convention center expansion (HKNA). Similarly, they each have different strategies for terminating the streets that dead end at the convention center - with a new mid-block boulevard (DCP); with a revitalized 11th Avenue (MBP); or with a mid-block pedestrian connections and parks (HKNA). Perhaps as the City's plan evolves, the best aspects of each of these can be combined in some way.

Beyond this, differences in the strategies are driven by competing objectives for the overall intensity of development, convention center expansion and the stadium, and in particular, by the availability of the Hudson Yards for development or for the convention center/stadium expansion:

### DCP: Midtown on 10th and a Half Avenue

With the western rail yards reserved for the convention center/stadium, the DCP proposal creates a super-sized office district opposite the Javits Center. This is used to support a major new public space that reduces the east-west block length, creates new north-south vistas and provides "front door addresses" for large scale development sites which are hard to come by in Manhattan. The question is whether the plan creates so much density in one part of the district, that it feels disjointed from its surroundings.

### HKNA: Midtown on the Tracks

The HKNA proposal, which does not contemplate a stadium and expands the convention center only to the south, moves much of development to the rail yards in an effort to protect the neighborhood north of 34th Street. This proposal exploits the fact that there is a zone along the north and south edges of the rail yard which can

be used for buildings that would line the convention center expansion. The question is whether the scale of the new open space, which correspond to the roof of the convention center hall, is simply too high and too vast, and whether this proposal can promote enough infill development to improve the neighborhood.

### MBP: The Far West Side Lite

The Manhattan Borough President's proposal, which does not contemplate a stadium and expands the convention center only to the north, is a conservative vision. It relies on accepted, if conventional, urban design principles of re-establishment of streets over super-blocks and context sensitive infill development that reinforces existing patterns, the placement of office buildings closer to transit and residential buildings closer to the waterfront/park amenity. The critical question is whether the scale of development and limited transit improvements are sufficient to meet the needs of CBD expansion, population growth in the city and revenue generation for amenities.

The DCP and HKNA plans in particular, which have roughly the same amount of total development, illustrate the degree to which the overall orientation of the plan is affected by the amount of development contemplated for the area over the rail yards and in the blocks between 10th and 11th Avenues. While there is a strong urban design logic to expanding the convention center south, where the super-blocks already exist, the question remains whether a convention center expansion without the stadium could provide more flexibility in the way density is distributed throughout the district. A convention facility without the stadium would allow for some amount of new development along its edges, particularly along the 34th Street and 11th Avenue corridors. Closest to the Hudson River Park, this development could be primarily residential. Eleventh Avenue and a new "10th and a Half Avenue" could still support large amounts of development, but perhaps at a scale somewhat smaller than suggested by the current renderings.

In addition to the distribution of density throughout the district, two other issues should be considered as plans for the Far West Side move forward.

## Create a New Edge for the Javits Convention Center.

Public investment in the Javits Center must serve to improve the connection between the Center and the surrounding neighborhood. While the discussion has focused on the north and south expansion of the existing footprint, there may also be the possibility of building in the zone between the front of the convention center and the edge of 11th Avenue. A hotel, with a relatively small footprint for example, could be built in the “pit” at the northwest corner of 34th Street and 11th Avenue. Re-making this edge of the Javits Center would support the goal of making 11th Avenue a suitable terminus for the streets that dead end into the convention center super-block. An interesting precedent in this regard is the new Washington, D.C. Convention Center which lines the “big box” with a robust mixed use program and contextual buildings. (Figure 18)

The current designs for the convention center, in both the State and HKNA Plans, include using this space for meeting rooms, which can also work if the facades facing 11th Avenue are animated and transparent.

## Consider the Strengths and Weaknesses of the Hudson Yards Stadium.

While the proposed sports and convention center is only one piece of the City's plan, it has clearly become the touchstone of the debate regarding the Far West Side. An earlier section of this report presents the criteria that we feel a stadium must achieve before gaining public approval. RPA remains concerned that this single project could jeopardize the many excellent elements of the City's comprehensive

plan for the district, including re-zoning for a new generation of growth, investments in much-needed public transit, and the long-awaited expansion of the Javits Convention Center. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement, due out later this spring, should fully investigate other options for the Hudson Yards site and alternative sites for a new sports complex.

As mentioned above, if the stadium were removed from the Far West Side plans, that site could be made available for other uses, including a more traditional convention center expansion, commercial or residential development, or public open space.

At the same time, opponents of the stadium must recognize the potential results of any decisions to use the Hudson Yards site for alternative purposes. These would include:

**Amending the New York City 2012 Olympics bid.** New York City's 2012 Olympics bid highlights a new stadium on the Far West Side to host the opening and closing ceremonies and various athletic competitions. Supporters of the bid argue that any amendments at this late stage in the process will effectively kill the submission. Others argue that only removing the most contentious element of the City's plan can create the widespread support the bid will need to be successful. Yet others argue that the future of the Far West Side is more important to the city and region than the Olympics.

**Finding other sources of revenue for expanding the Javits Center.** New York needs an expanded convention center. If the stadium does work as a synergistic component of the new convention corridor, it will provide a unique conference facility primarily financed by private sources. Without the substantial investment by the New York Jets, public leaders will be forced to choose between scaling down the overall Javits expansion plans or finding additional sources of revenue.

**Identifying a different catalytic development project.** Love it or hate it, the Jets Stadium is likely to be the first major private investment in the Far West Side. While we are still very concerned about the facility's long-term benefits to the district, it is difficult to turn away a willing investor able to finance and build on such a dramatic scale. Without this early investment by the Jets, new investors will need to be found for this site.

## Image Sources

**Figure 10** Conard, Michael, and David Smiley. *Hell's Kitchen South*. Stockholm: Falth & Hassler, 2002. (pg. 88) **Figure 12** Peterson, David C. *Developing Sports, Convention and Performing Arts Centers*. 3rd ed. Washington D.C.: ULI- The Urban Land Institute, 2001. (pg. 194) **Figure 18** Peterson, David C. *Developing Sports, Convention and Performing Arts Centers*. 3rd ed. Washington D.C.: ULI- The Urban Land Institute, 2001. (pg. 66)

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Research shows that proponent studies of the economic impacts of sports facilities commonly err by 1) failing to account for substitution effect, i.e. expenditures gained by the sports facility that used to be spent at pre-existing local businesses, 2) failing to net out the actual cost of the stadium in the economic benefit analysis, 3) failing to take into account “leakage,” i.e. sports players and team owners spending or paying taxes outside the local economy, and 4) using a multiplier that is too generous. (Baade, R.A. 1996. “Professional Sports as Catalysts for Metropolitan Economic Development.” *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 18) (1): 1-17; Noll, R.G. and A. Zimbalist. 1997. *Sports, Jobs, and Taxes*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press; Siegfried, J. and A. Zimbalist. 2000. “The Economics of Sports Facilities and their Communities.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, summer. A more anecdotal account of many cities' experience with sports facilities can be found in Delaney, Kevin J., and Eckstein, Rick. 2003. *Public Dollars, Private Stadiums*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press

Fig. 18 – Washington D.C. Convention Center (TVS Architects)



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