

Independent Survey Finds Zoning Change Would Disrupt Garment Industry

80 percent of garment workers & 65 percent of customers unlikely to travel to Sunset Park

(August 14, 2017 | New York, New York) The Municipal Art Society of New York (MAS) released findings from a series of surveys that reinforced the importance of a central garment district in Manhattan. The surveys—conducted by MAS in collaboration with the Design Trust for Public Space and the Pratt Center for Community Development between April and July 2017—found potentially disastrous outcomes for the industry should the City’s proposal to remove zoning protections from its Manhattan neighborhood go forward without any new safeguards in place.

The survey results come as the Department of City Planning prepares to take up the zoning change in a review meeting scheduled for August 21, informed by recommendations from the Garment District Steering Committee. MAS continues to call on Mayor Bill de Blasio to support this industry by finding a local real estate solution that allows businesses to remain in the Garment District.

“The future of the city’s fashion industry is at stake. Our surveys show that the City’s plan for the Garment District is grounded in a fundamental misunderstanding of this industry, a rare, thriving manufacturing enclave in Manhattan,” said **Elizabeth Goldstein, President of MAS**. “An economic sector this significant to New York should not be made vulnerable. These entrepreneurs and skilled workers—mostly immigrants and mostly women—have made New York the capital of the fashion industry. They must have the opportunity to remain in the Garment District.”

Select Findings

The findings by MAS demonstrate the role of Manhattan’s Garment District as the center of gravity for the industry. The surveys also found widespread anxiety within the industry about the City’s proposal to open a new garment manufacturing campus in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. The new campus, located in the former Bush Terminal complex, is not expected to open until 2020 and will offer only a fraction of the manufacturing space currently in use in the District.

Regarding Manhattan’s Garment District

- **35 percent report living outside the five boroughs** entirely, most likely commuting into Midtown on New Jersey Transit, MetroNorth, and the Long Island Rail Road; **less than one percent** of workers in Manhattan’s Garment District report living in Brooklyn
- Both customers and business owners report that the clustering of garment businesses in a tight-knit district is exactly its strength: **85 percent of buyers** visit multiple businesses on a single day, some visiting six or more each trip; **71 percent of business owners** work with neighboring businesses on a daily basis, including designers, theater costumers, manufacturers, patternmakers, wholesale and storefront retail suppliers, and consultants
- **88 percent of fashion students** report that proximity to Manhattan’s Garment District was a factor in their decision to study in New York
- Rent increases and development pressure were cited as the biggest threats to Garment District businesses, with **42 percent of owners** reporting that any increase in rent at this point would put their business in jeopardy
- Garment District business owners **overwhelmingly supported local real estate solutions** as their preferred outcome: **84 percent** calling for rent stabilization measures and **80 percent** calling for consolidated, rent-protected relocation within the District

- **77 percent of owners** report that they have been located in the District for more than 10 years; Manhattan's Garment District has been thriving and would continue to grow in a stable, healthy ecosystem of diverse businesses and affordable working spaces

Regarding the Proposed Sunset Park Campus

- **80 percent of Garment District workers** and **65 percent of customers** say they are **unwilling to move** to Sunset Park
- 83 percent of workers reported that traveling to Sunset Park would **increase their commute time by 45-90 minutes**; 80 percent said they would be unlikely to follow their jobs to the new location
- 70 percent of customers reported that traveling to Sunset Park would **increase their travel time by 30 minutes or more**; 65 percent said they were unlikely to make the trip

Recent Background

In January 2017, Mayor de Blasio announced an investment of \$136 million to create a Made in NY apparel industry campus in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. The City subsequently announced in March that it would seek to change the zoning in Manhattan's Garment District to eliminate the protections for production space. In early summer 2017, Deputy Mayor Alicia Glen, Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer, and Council Member Corey Johnson announced the formation of the Garment District Steering Committee. The Committee is chaired by Borough President Brewer and includes representatives from the fashion industry, garment workers, the surrounding community, and other stakeholders, to develop recommendations to the City related to these proposals. On August 21, the Department of City Planning is expected to take up the zoning change proposal for Manhattan's Garment District in a review meeting.

About The Municipal Art Society of New York

For nearly 125 years, MAS has worked to educate and inspire New Yorkers to engage in the betterment of our city. Through three core campaign areas, MAS protects New York's legacy spaces, encourages thoughtful planning and urban design, and fosters complete neighborhoods across the five boroughs. For more information, visit mas.org.