



June 22, 2020

Council Member Brad Lander
New York City Council, District 39
250 Broadway, Suite 1751
New York, NY 10007

Dear Council Member Brad Lander,

Our world is in the midst of a crisis – evoking in the hearts and on the minds of many, the dismantling of the old system for a new one. Protest movements and a pandemic in the form of COVID-19 are clarion calls for monumental change and action from the local level to the global sphere. It is now time for bold change like never before.

It is incumbent upon us to act as a beacon of hope to ignite a transformation in the present and of the future in our city. The crowds of protesters (some constituents) taking to the streets, are daily risking their lives and livelihoods during the pandemic to demand change. Consequently, The Municipal Art Society of New York (MAS) is using this moment to make a sincere appeal for a hard look at the yet-to-be released Gowanus Rezoning Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

Superstorm Sandy was undoubtedly one of the most destructive storms to hit our region in 2012. It imperiled our great city's residents, impacted our physical infrastructure, impeded air and ground transportation, and eroded our waterways at great cost in the billions of dollars. Superstorm Sandy had brought to bear quite drastically the importance of improving resiliency in our built environment. Moreover, Superstorm Sandy has taught us that we need to consider fundamental change in land-use policy and the planning of future development.

The COVID-19 pandemic makes it exponentially that much more pressing. Now is the time to double down and re-envision future large-scale developments and rezonings with a renewed emphasis on public health, demographics, long-term socio-economic and environmental impacts, especially in communities that have been adversely affected or previously overlooked. Taking into account the known and unknown impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the social justice issues that have recently boiled over, the city finds itself in an entirely new landscape when compared to a year ago at the release of the Draft Scope of Work.

Based on these happenings, we believe the scope and development assumptions that currently frame the rezoning need to reflect and adjust to both present and future conditions more accurately and synergistically. In terms of the CEQR analysis, in the least, evaluations of public health and socio-

economic conditions—including impacts on current residents and small businesses—need to be revisited. We also believe a new public scoping process that focuses on these issues needs to be introduced before we can forge ahead with a proposal that would bring 18,000 new residents and transform the Gowanus neighborhood.

As such, we urge the City to hold off certifying the rezoning as currently planned in order to reexamine the proposal with fresh eyes. Given the magnitude of the development, we further urge the City to take this opportunity to adapt a new vision that sets a precedent for smart planning throughout the five boroughs.

We greatly appreciate your attention and thoughtful consideration on the given recommendations and look forward to having a larger conversation on the issues presented in this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Goldstein", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Elizabeth Goldstein
President, Municipal Art Society of New York