

ONLINE

October 18, 2013

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Garodnick Pressured On Midtown East Rezoning

By Andrew Hawkins



A coalition of building trades and developers is pressuring Councilman Dan Garodnick, a candidate for council speaker, to support the Bloomberg administration's controversial plan to rezone a huge swath of midtown Manhattan.

In a letter sent Friday to Mr. Garodnick, Richard Anderson, president of the New York Building Congress, and Howard Rothschild, present of the Reality Advisory Board on Labor Relations, call on the councilman to support the 73-block rezoning, calling it a boon for the construction and building services industries and a pathway to the creation of tens of thousands of new jobs.

Underscoring the letter is Mr. Garodnick's unspoken ambition to succeed Christine Quinn in January as speaker of the City Council. Without mentioning next year's speaker's race, Messrs. Anderson and Rothschild make clear that much rests on Mr. Garodnick's decision. (On land use decisions, the council usually follows the direction of the member in whose district the project is slated, making Mr. Garodnick the key player in the midtown east rezoning.)

"These good-paying, middle-class jobs will only be created with the approval of the New York City Council, and one council member in particular—you," the letter to Mr. Garodnick says.

They cite recent testimony from the Bloomberg administration forecasting the creation of 70,000 construction jobs as a result of the rezoning. And they estimate that more than 1,500 new building service jobs would be generated, based on the projected amount of new office space and current employment numbers in other buildings in the district. (Employment estimates, though, are often seen as rosy projections intended to boost a project's chances of approval.)

Mr. Garodnick's approval is seen as crucial to the rezoning's passage. He recently asked the Independent Budget Office to examine whether there would be enough demand for office space in the coming years to fill the square footage that developers are expected to create under the rezoning, which is opposed by some community groups and landmark preservationists. A hearing on the rezoning is scheduled for next week. The Council needs to vote on the plan by mid-November.

It was unclear whether building trades and developers were using Mr. Garodnick's interest in being speaker as leverage in the rezoning vote, though one source suggested it was not untoward.

"Haven't heard about any pressure, but wouldn't be surprised," one building trades official said via email. "It's obviously a leverage point. But the sense I get is this is not a huge priority for the trades."

Another insider close to the rezoning issue noted that building trades do not traditionally play a large role in the race for council speaker.

"I'm not sure what role the trades play in a speaker's race, so I don't think the two are connected," the insider said.

But Mr. Anderson said he believes Mr. Garodnick's decision will reflect on his chances next year.

"He's got to handle this issue well, if he wants to be speaker where you have to deal with issues like this on a regular basis," Mr. Anderson said. "You've got to show you can deal with an important one in his own district."

In a statement, Mr. Garodnick said it was "important" that midtown buildings not be stuck with antiquated zoning regulations, but said he has been unable to resolve some of the rezoning's outstanding issues during his negotiations with the Bloomberg administration. "There are still open questions about the pricing of air rights, the plan for infrastructure and public realm improvements, and whether all of the density should be added as-of-right, or with further community input," he said.

The rezoning is one of the last major components of Mayor Michael Bloomberg's land use agenda, and its passage is not yet certain. Crain's Daniel Geiger wrote last month, "Questions have hounded the controversial plan, which seeks to spur development of a new generation of bigger, state-of-the art office buildings in the area. Critics warn that the rezoning could end up

encouraging the demolition of treasured architectural gems and clog the area's already stretched transit and pedestrian infrastructure with thousands of new office workers in the coming years."

The administration this week provided more details of potential public-realm improvements to complement the office space that would come to market.

The rezoning would result in the modernization of 10 million square feet of office space in addition to creating 4.5 million square feet of new offices, according to administration projections. Many buildings in the district exceed current zoning limits and thus cannot be substantially renovated without having floors lopped off to comply with those limits, something no property owner is about to do. That creates a risk that midtown will fall substantially behind competing business districts in the decades to come. Nonetheless, some critics have said the Bloomberg administration should have left the complicated rezoning to the next administration.

[Rezoning Letter Final – 10.18](#)



October 18, 2013

Hon. Daniel R. Garodnick
New York City Council
250 Broadway, Suite 1880
New York, NY 10007

Dear Council Member Garodnick,

New York City has before it an historic opportunity: the rezoning of East Midtown stands to generate billions of dollars in economic activity, hundreds of millions of dollars of infrastructure and public realm investment, and – perhaps most critically – **tens of thousands of good-paying, middle-class jobs**. This is a principle reason why our organizations strongly support this planning proposal.

In poll after poll, New Yorkers have made clear that the issue at the top of their minds is job creation. A recent Marist survey found that one out of every four New Yorkers listed jobs as their top concern for the next mayor. As leaders in an industry that was among those hit the hardest by the recession, we agree.

But we can't just focus on creating jobs without also ensuring their quality – it's crucial that employers are providing good paying, middle-income jobs. Since 2001, the availability of mid-wage occupation employment has decreased by 7.3%, while other categories of employment have risen. The next mayor and City Council must prioritize not just job creation, but employment opportunities that will allow New Yorkers to pay the bills and support a family.

This rezoning has the potential to create these important middle-class jobs. In testimony delivered by Deputy Mayor Robert Steel before the City Planning Commission, the City has forecast the creation of **over 70,000 construction jobs** as a result of the rezoning. Given the type of buildings and scale of the construction envisioned, the lion's share of these jobs will be unionized.

In addition, the Realty Advisory Board, which negotiates with the building service workers union on behalf of employers, believes a conservative estimate based on the City's projected amount of new office space created through the rezoning and current employment numbers in other buildings in the district indicates that more than **1,500 new building service jobs** would be created through the rezoning. Considering neighborhood trends, it's likely that

most, if not all, of these positions would be quality jobs with such unions as 32BJ SEIU and Operating Engineers Local 94.

Finally, changes made by the City Planning Commission in August would require that a special permit be obtained by property owners that will look to redevelop their property through use of the District Improvement Bonus and would devote 20% or more of their new development to hotel or residential use. This use of the special permit will undoubtedly lead to the creation of unionized hotel jobs.

These good paying, middle-class jobs will only be created with the approval of the New York City Council, and one Councilmember in particular – you. We would urge you to support this rezoning proposal which will provide an important employment opportunity for tens of thousands of New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard T. Anderson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Richard T. Anderson, President
New York Building Congress

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Howard Rothschild". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with a large initial "H".

Howard Rothschild, Esq.,
President
Realty Advisory Board on Labor
Relations, Inc