

**Testimony of Andrew S. Hollweck
Vice President, New York Building Congress
At a Hearing of the New York City Council
Regarding the East Midtown Rezoning
October 22, 2013**



The New York Building Congress supports the Bloomberg Administration's proposed East Midtown rezoning. The rezoning will permit responsible renewal of New York City's premier office district, facilitate job growth and expansion of the City's tax base. We urge the Council to approve this plan.

East Midtown is anchored by Grand Central Terminal, which will soon house the MTA's East Side Access project, providing a direct rail link between Long Island and Manhattan's east side for the first time, bringing tens of thousands of new commuters to the neighborhood.

Failure to capitalize on this multi-billion dollar infrastructure investment will be a missed opportunity for the City. Right now, zoning guidelines for the neighborhood discourage creation of new office buildings and actively prevent useful increases in bulk on many key sites. The Administration's proposal enables builders to assemble sites, tear down existing large structures, and erect the larger, modern buildings to house a growing workforce.

Moreover, because of their age and quality, the building stock around Grand Central is simply inadequate to accommodate the changing needs of many commercial office tenants. For example, industries within the technology sector that hardly existed two decades ago are beginning to look for Class A space and have different needs than traditional office tenants. With an average building age of 70 years, some buildings simply cannot offer the floor plans and amenities important to many of these new tenants.

The rezoning should attract more people to the area, which is why the Building Congress supports thoughtful proposals to improve public amenities around Grand Central. For example, a protected bike or pedestrian route on the elevated portion of Park Avenue around Grand Central makes good sense and would be a beautiful new amenity. The City has also agreed to pre-fund some of the critical improvements to mass transit and public open spaces that are to be supported by the District Improvement Fund. We support this effort, and urge a careful evaluation of the fund to determine if it accomplishes its intended goals.

Finally, we encourage very prudent application of the City's landmarking power to protect only those buildings with clear architectural value. This will ensure that the full benefits of the rezoning are realized.

The East Midtown rezoning will facilitate development of modern office space to attract and retain the world class employers that drive the City's economy. The Building Congress endorses the East Midtown Rezoning and urges the Council to approve this plan.