

Testimony to the New York City Council  
By Robert LaValva, President, New Amsterdam Market  
Thursday March 14, 2013

Honorable Members of the New York City Council: Good morning. My name is Robert LaValva and I am the President of the New Amsterdam Public Market Association. New Amsterdam Market is an economic development association that fosters small businesses who support responsible agriculture, regional economies, and fair trade. For several years now, we have held markets under the elevated highway fronting the Old Fulton Fish Market on South Street in Lower Manhattan. Our market now includes 50 weekly vendors as well as numerous visiting vendors, most of them entrepreneurs, who collectively provide meaningful employment to hundreds of New Yorkers. Each year, we bring 50,000 customers from the entire city to the South Street Seaport neighborhood, a place most city residents have chosen to avoid.

We propose that the two remaining, city-owned Fulton Fish Market buildings on the waterfront be preserved and rehabilitated as a permanent, year round, indoor home for New Amsterdam Market. Such an institution will rival the great markets of the world and create a significant economic impact for our city. Community Board 1 supports this proposal and has made it a condition of their approval of the ULURP you are now reviewing. Our mission has been embraced by Lower Manhattan residents, New Yorkers from all five boroughs, and visitors from abroad. An article by Mark Bittman in this week's New York Times articulates our vision far better than I ever could myself. I urge every Council Member to read this article, the testimony provided today by our vendors and supporters, emails written on our behalf to the Council Speaker and Council Member Chin, and comments to our petition (now approaching 4,000 signatures) to understand what vast potential the two Fish Market buildings hold to regenerate Lower Manhattan and create a unique and special place for all New Yorkers.

Some people will try to tell you that the ULURP before the Council today has nothing to do the Fish Market Site, and that we should express our concerns in the future. I am here to tell you that is not the case.

By voting to approve this ULURP, you will cause the City's existing Lease with Howard Hughes to be amended so that the City would no longer be obliged to maintain the two remaining, historic Fulton Fish Market buildings as a market at all. In addition, only office uses will be permitted in one of these Fish Market buildings, known as the Tin Building. Furthermore, by voting to approve this ULURP, you will be approving a rezoning not only of the Pier 17 mall, but of the entire waterfront from Maiden Lane to the Brooklyn Bridge, including the site of the Fulton Fish Market buildings. What is troubling about this is that EDC and Howard Hughes have a Letter of Intent to redevelop the Fulton Fish Market Site as a luxury residential high rise, hotel and retail complex. The proposed rezoning therefore enables a development that has never been revealed to the public or reviewed by the Council. If we wait until these plans are proposed, it will be too late. The only time to protect this site from demolition is now.

In conclusion, we respectfully request the Council vote NO on the ULURP application before you until such time that EDC and Howard Hughes submit their mixed use development plan for the Fulton Fish Market site to full public review. We rely on the Council to ensure a robust and transparent public review process and request the formation of a Council-led community advisory group to serve this aim. If the Council is unwilling to vote NO, we respectfully request, at a minimum, that you only approve the rezoning of Pier 17 and not the entire East River waterfront. Without the Fulton Fish Market, this maritime district which generations have fought so hard to preserve will lose all its meaning. Our city will also lose its only opportunity to create a market like no other in the world in a place like no other in the world. This is the essence of economic development. The future of the Old Fulton Fulton Fish Market now rests in your hands.