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**Gale A. Brewer, Borough President**

**October 25, 2018**

**Re: Comments on the Draft Scope of Work to Prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Borough-Based Jail System, CEQR No. 18DOC001Y**

To: Commissioner Cynthia Brann

When the plan to close Riker's Island was announced in 2017, my office created a task force to convene stakeholders in a collaborative process. Our goal was twofold: move toward closing Riker's Island and reduce the number of New Yorkers who are incarcerated through restorative means such as supervised release, parole reform, rehabilitation, and mental health and substance abuse services. We knew that closing Riker's Island would not be an easy task and that community input would be crucial to a successful plan for rehousing detainees locally. We made that community input a priority of our task force.

During our third task force meeting this past July, we were informed by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ) of the aggressive timeline to close Riker's Island and to build four new borough-based facilities. We were previously told by the MOCJ that there would be public meetings in April and June of this year to obtain community input, but these meetings never took place. Additionally, we were not told that 80 Centre Street was a potential site for the Manhattan facility until two weeks before the draft scope was released in mid-August. And upon the release of the draft scope, we learned that 80 Centre Street was not one of multiple sites under consideration, but instead had been selected as the sole potential location for the new jail.

This process has completely excluded meaningful community input, and the selection of the site at 80 Centre Street without community feedback is exactly what my office and the task force were working to avoid: a process that alienates the community and makes implementation more difficult.

Initial conversations surrounding the closure of Riker's Island included options to repurpose or rebuild the Manhattan Detention Center at 125 White Street to meet the goals of the closure plan as well as potentially providing an additional community benefit in the form of community space and/or affordable housing. Why aren't these options being considered as viable alternatives? Excluding this site in planning is contributing to the confusion within the community. There are many community members who believe that the proposed 80 Centre Street site will be an additional jail in the community, instead of replacing what is present.

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There needs to be more communication and community involvement in planning for a new jail facility. You are forcing the community to choose between justice reform and their desire for genuine community engagement in the planning process. The proposed review process is insufficient and does not allow for real community input. The selection of 80 Centre Street in the draft scope indicates to the community that this is a “done deal” and they are understandably angry.

Community Boards 1 and 3 are currently dealing with extensive land use issues. It was foolish for the Mayor’s Office to rush the process and disallow community input in the plan’s formulation.

The plan will only succeed if alternatives are investigated thoroughly with input from all stakeholders. I ask that a community engagement and visioning process take place before any more steps are taken towards siting a new jail facility in this borough. For instance, community members in Chinatown are upset that senior housing has not been proposed for the site when the Bronx proposal does include senior housing. A public planning process could allow for community members to discuss the uses that would be most appropriate for the site and the various tradeoffs involved.

I ask that the following be included in the scope of work for the environmental review of the proposed project.

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The environmental analysis should include 125 White Street as an alternative site so that this potential site is in scope for ULURP. All appropriate environmental analyses should be undertaken for this site in addition to 80 Centre Street.

### **LAND USE, ZONING, AND PUBLIC POLICY**

The study area should be expanded to a 1,200-foot radius. The current study area does not take Chinatown into account, which would be the community affected the most by the proposed project. Expanding the study area will give a more accurate assessment of this project’s impact on the surrounding community.

### **SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS**

There is a great concern around indirect business displacement. The Marriage Bureau and the other offices currently housed at 80 Centre are an important source of revenue for local small businesses. Moving these offices and displacing their workers and clients, including newly-weds

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and their families and friends, could harm those businesses. This potential indirect business displacement should be analyzed.

### **COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

The Draft Scope of Work states that there are no plans to analyze impact to community facilities for the Manhattan site as everything will be relocated into the new 80 Centre Street site or to nearby offices and sites such as the Manhattan Detention Complex. Has the Department of Corrections and all responsible parties confirmed that all the offices can be relocated to adequate sites nearby? Potential impacts to all uses on site should be thoroughly analyzed.

### **OPEN SPACE**

Lack of adequate open space, particularly open green space, is an issue in this community. According to the Draft Scope, there will be an analysis based on the incremental change in population due to the proposed project. I believe this is not sufficient and makes an assumption that the area already has adequate open space, which it does not. I ask that a detailed analysis of open space take place and to take into consideration the current open green space available to the community and how the proposed development will impact this open space, especially considering the shadows impact the development may have on this scarce resource. While CEQR typically examines the incremental impact of an action, this does not absolve policy makers of the responsibility to include existing inequities in their analysis.

### **SHADOWS**

The proposed project will likely exceed the height of the current building, which would result in significant shadow impacts to the surrounding areas, including open space such as Columbus Park, which serves as playground and sports field space for local schools, as well as used extensively by seniors who live in the area. These potential shadows impacts should be thoroughly studied. Additionally, expanding the study area in order to adequately assess the impact of the shadows cast by the proposed project is important in order to understand the full impact of the proposed project's shadows on the neighborhood.

### **HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

Due to the historical significance of the site, I have concerns regarding locating the jail at 80 Centre Street. 80 Centre Street is National Register-eligible and its demolition should not happen unless we have thoroughly examined all the alternatives. The building was completed in 1930 and is an important building for local government, housing the office of the Manhattan District Attorney and other court offices and crime labs. 80 Centre Street also contains the borough's Marriage Bureau. This office was renovated extensively under the previous administration using millions of dollars in City capital, solidifying its place as the most popular wedding venue in the city if not the world. These weddings provide a significant economic benefit to the area, as

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couples celebrate by visiting local businesses to eat and drink. The importance of the Marriage Bureau was felt the most on July 24, 2011, when hundreds of couples waited outside the office to obtain marriage licenses, as it was the first day same-sex marriage was legal in New York State. The impact on historic resources should be analyzed and thorough mitigations proposed.

### **URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES**

Proposing a tall building at 80 Centre Street goes against the original and surviving urban design of the neighborhood. William Haugaard, the architect who designed 80 Centre Street, did so under a height restriction so that it would not overshadow Foley Square and the courthouses in the area. Given that this proposal directly conflicts with the extant urban design, the potential adverse urban design impacts should be analyzed.

### **TRANSPORTATION**

Given the current and planned street work projects, and the ability of pedestrians to navigate the neighborhood due to street closures post-9/11, a detailed analysis of the changes of the pedestrian experience of this project should be done as part of the analysis. The traffic analysis should also look at the potential to reopen streets such as Park Row to allow for better traffic flow to and from the area.

Above all, I urge you to change your process to allow for much more community input and to include 125 White Street and other sites as real alternatives in the scope of work. Chinatown feels ignored, and as one of their representatives I understand why. This process was not at all transparent. That being said, I am fully committed to closing Rikers and to siting a jail in proximity to the courthouses; we just need a better process.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue. We look forward to working with you and all stakeholders as the proposed project moves forward.

Sincerely,

Gale A. Brewer