



Regional Plan Association

... a research and planning agency supported by voluntary membership to promote the coordinated development of the New York- New Jersey-Connecticut Metropolitan Region.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

REGIONAL PLAN OPPOSES REGO PARK REZONING FOR LARGE SCALE OFFICE, COMMERCIAL COMPLEX

Urges City Reaffirm Jamaica as Queens Center, Building on Heavy
Public Investment in Transportation, College, Redevelopment Area

Attached is the statement of Regional Plan Association opposing the proposed rezoning and remapping to allow a large scale commercial, office complex in Rego Park, Queens. The statement was delivered by Sheldon Pollack, Information Director, Wednesday evening, September 17 at the hearing called by the City Planning Commission in Queens Borough Hall.

Mr. Pollack stated that \$800 million of federal, State and City investment is underway or scheduled to facilitate development of Jamaica as the Center for Queens, including very large investments in public transportation to improve and expand its accessibility. This investment would be wasted if office jobs and commercial activities are allowed to scatter throughout the City in areas serviced largely by the private auto.

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Statement of
Sheldon Pollack, Information Director
Regional Plan Association
at the
New York City Planning Commission Hearing
September 17, 1975
on the
Proposed Rezoning, Remapping for Large Scale
Commercial, Residential Development, Rego Park, Queens

Eight years ago, in 1967, Mayor Lindsay announced his strong support for the redevelopment of Jamaica as the business, commercial, cultural and educational center of Queens. That action initiated a series of steps by the City and State of New York and the federal government that has resulted in an expenditure or commitment of \$400 million toward that objective.

Among the projects undertaken to provide Jamaica with the image and infrastructure necessary to be the center for Queens are: (1) the location of York College, with work underway on its permanent \$72 million campus, (2) removal of the old El, (3) a new subway line to South Queens passing through Jamaica Center and stopping under York College, (4) the location of the Family Court and a decision to consolidate most of the City court system in Jamaica, (5) ten acres of prime commercial land acquired by the City at a cost of \$12 million and zoned for large scale commercial development adjacent to a subway station, (6) an additional parking facility with 450 spaces to provide a total of 1,650 municipal off-street parking spaces.

In addition, there has been public investment of the magnitude of \$400 million in upgrading the Long Island Rail Road, most of whose trains stop in Jamaica, within easy access of the renewal and commercial area.

Why a center and why Jamaica? Regional Plan Association advocates the location of offices, shopping, higher education and other services in planned centers rather than each facility on its own. Wherever possible, these centers should be renewed old downtowns. Only compact activity centers can support public transportation capable of attracting people from their cars. Centers enrich life by encouraging the use of libraries, adult education, the arts because they are mingled with our day-to-day activities. Office activities are more efficient there because links to other offices and services are convenient. Renewed downtowns bring the whole community together and assure that rich and poor and black and white have equal access to the opportunities offered. This has been the stated policy of the City, too.

Jamaica offers all of these advantages. It has the best public transportation network in the Region--perhaps in the country--outside of Manhattan, capable of bringing in suburbanites and exurbanites by train, residents of the City by bus, train and subway. It is close to Kennedy airport. It is surrounded by people of all income levels and backgrounds. This is particularly important to the upwardly-mobile South Jamaica black community. The experience of York College demonstrates this. While it has attracted a predominantly white student body from a wide area, York College has been a special benefit to the neighboring Jamaica and South Jamaica residents.

Jamaica today. In today's world of rising energy costs and potential shortages, good public transit is considered a necessity. Other cities now have to invest sums to provide rail and bus transit. Even affluent counties like Nassau struggle to develop a barely viable bus system. The New York City Planning Commission now faces a crucial decision, i.e., whether to take maximum advantage of the in-place and costly transit improvements by locating jobs and large scale commercial facilities in Jamaica or further aggravate the already congested auto traffic on the Long Island Expressway and Queens Boulevard by allowing them to locate in Rego Park. This at a time when the federal Environmental Protection Agency is insisting on reduced auto traffic in the City for health reasons and other national agencies are urging a shift to public transportation for energy conservation.

The purpose of City planning is to shape the City in the public interest. That process produced a zoning ordinance prohibiting the proposed use in Rego Park. By changing the zoning and allowing the office complex there, the City will be allowing a private firm to shape the City, and public investment will have to scramble to fit the needs. This is backwards. Public investment should lead private investment in the direction indicated by the public planning processes. That direction--clearly--is Jamaica Center.

The City of New York has set up the Office of the Mayor in Jamaica to expedite the development there of a major center. The Greater Jamaica Development Corporation was established to bring together the civic and business community in the same effort. The conditions that prompted eight years of effort--and considerable success--are even more relevant today. The project before you, therefore, more than ever belongs in Jamaica where the supporting public facilities are in place. It will be to the long-range advantage of New York City, of the residents of Queens, Rego Park and Jamaica for you to not approve the special mapping and zoning changes for the commercial and office space proposed in tonight's hearing.

It is always tempting--particularly in a time of unemployment and threatened tax base--to take what you can get and be thankful. But the City's problems of today were sowed many years ago, when people in your position had that attitude: let's just get through today's problems and let our successors worry about the results. This City has two great assets in economic competition with the rest of the country. We have the greatest assembly of top professional and executive talent in the world in a small area, easy to consult. And we have a public transportation network feeding our several downtowns that allows independence of the automobile. Let's not throw away these increasingly important advantages for a momentary gain.

By scattering jobs and services away from transportation centers linked to Manhattan, these two New York City assets are weakened not strengthened. By building in Jamaica and downtown Brooklyn, the linkage with and attraction of Manhattan's services are enhanced along with the potential of the public transportation system.

To affirm the requests before you would be to signal that the concept of new centers for the City is to be abandoned, that large-scale capital investments underway to support them are in jeopardy, and that development is to be allowed at the whim of builders. Admittedly, the City needs the revenue and jobs the projects will produce, but not at such costs. It is just this kind of short-range, facile approach that has brought the City to its knees. More of the same will not cure its problems, only compound them.