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**Testimony before the City Planning Commission on Proposed East Midtown Rezoning
August 7, 2013 by Council Member Gale A. Brewer**

My name is Gale A. Brewer and I represent the Upper West Side and northern Clinton in the City Council. I am testifying on the Commission's modification of the proposed East Midtown rezoning. Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

Last year I urged the Department of City Planning and the Mayor's office to reconsider the impact of their proposal, and to allow for a long, thorough planning process. Less than 12 months later the plan is before us once again- only somewhat modified, still ill-conceived and a rush to judgment, and in essence a vague set of ideas with the potential to do unnecessary harm.

I urge you to pay close attention – as I am sure you have – to the report of the Multi-Community Board Task Force because they raise the questions that must be answered before an application moves forward, as has Council Member Dan Garodnick. I know that the Borough President has also made insightful comments that are before us today.

The most important aspect of the modified proposal is up-front funding for public space and transportation prior to major rebuilding, including expansion of capacity on the 4, 5, and 6 lines at Grand Central Terminal. However, these are just concepts - there is nothing in the proposal that could be accurately described as a *plan* or a timetable to make them into a reality. Specifically, there is no funding mechanism for the hundreds of millions of dollars that the subway redesign would require. This, at a time when the city is facing a multi-billion dollar budget shortfall and the MTA is already burdened by massive debt, with fares and tolls to pay for it already projected to rise 30% over the next few years. The "plan" before you seems to be a blank slate of unfunded ideas, upon which unknown parties, at an unknown time, will reshape East Midtown and its iconic architectural identity into an unknown form at their whim.

The Commission has done excellent, thoughtful rezoning in other parts of the city- including in my own City Council District; please don't sign off on these vague promises, unfunded concepts, and uncontrollable consequences as a "plan" for New York. We need to emulate the process of the planning for the Hudson Yards, for instance, and come up with a more

thoroughly researched plan that better takes into account the needs of the East Midtown community, and the city at large.

The Commission's East Midtown proposals for mixed-use high rises and air rights transfer are a place to *begin* planning. But the specifications for the Northern Sub-Area seem intended only to address the demands of a few property owners. Without specified site controls on location, height, volume, density, and other key planning factors it is easy to foresee Park, Madison and Lexington Avenues lost to the piecemeal creation of second-rate high-rise corridors like Second and Third Avenues - walls of sterile towers, streets devoid of green public space or any amenity, drowned in traffic and air pollution, and created only to provide sunny aeries for a few high above. In this respect, the threat to Park Avenue in the revised setback proposal is particularly dire.

As I stated last year, one of the most alarming potential side effects of a poorly thought out rezoning plan will be an influx of uninspired buildings into one of the city's most venerated skyscraper districts. This rezoning should include a preservation plan for the area's iconic buildings, and strict limits on intrusive development around landmarks like the Chrysler, Chanin, and RCA buildings, as well as Grand Central Station. It should also include a strong preservation component for other important buildings, like the Lincoln Building and the Fred Friendly Building, that distinguish their sites and help define the city. In addition, the plan should require that architects working under the East Midtown rezoning match the quality of these inspired buildings, and ensure that New York's status as the world's greatest modern architectural landscape is not lost to the mediocrity that characterizes some new construction.

In closing, I once again urge you to step back from this rush to judgment. Everyone understands that many of the area's older buildings come with low ceilings and column spacing that make them unattractive to current technology build-outs, and the city must modernize to survive, and that each generation must make room for new ideas and new plans. Some things that we cherish are inevitably lost. But this great city should never *plan* to hasten the destruction of what it treasures and what identifies it in the eyes of the world. The Commission's highest responsibility is not to act on such motives. There is plenty of time to rezone East Midtown rationally and creatively, and to chart a wise course in doing so.