

October 13, 2009

Dear Councilmember,

As leaders of New York City unions representing more than 750,000 members, we are writing to draw your attention to an issue that is very important to us and one that you will soon be voting on: the rezoning and sale of the city-owned Kingsbridge Armory to the Related Companies.

We strongly, and firmly, support our brothers and sisters in the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union and their work at the Armory. We urge you to demand The Related Companies meet the goals set forth in the Economic Development Corporation's RFP, as well as the conditions spelled out in the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) presented to Related by Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz.

When issuing the RFP for the redevelopment of the landmarked 575,000 square foot Bronx Armory, the EDC recognized the need for city-subsidized development to benefit the community by calling for "development plans that maximize the number of jobs that meet the City's living wage and health benefits standards ('living wage jobs')", and to "not duplicate or directly compete with existing retail."

Unfortunately, Related's application for the purchase of the historic Armory does not meet these goals. The developer is proposing to create 1,200 permanent part-time jobs, with no commitment to labor standards or benefits. Related plans to build a city-subsidized mall for national retail chains to compete against locally owned businesses.

The CBA written by Borough President Ruben Diaz, Community Board 7, State Assemblyman Jose Rivera and KARA (a broad coalition of community groups, clergy, small business and labor) calls for the following: permanent living wage jobs, first source local hiring, protection of the right of retail workers to join a union without fear or intimidation, community and recreation space, and the exclusion of a supermarket and other stores that would be detrimental to local businesses.

Related should also address other issues, such as severe traffic congestion and the additional environmental and health hazards this project will create.

It is time for New York City to move beyond a failed economic development model that promotes low-wage work. Cities such as Los Angeles (where Related has agreed to pay living wages), Minneapolis and Santa Fe are showing that good economic development and sustainable jobs can go hand in hand. Our goal should be to offer real economic opportunity to New Yorkers working in the Armory once construction is completed.

The Related Companies' plan has the potential to become the economic engine of the northwest Bronx. This will only happen if they agree to an enforceable, transparent CBA.

We join Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, RWDSU President Stuart Appelbaum and the KARA coalition in urging you to demand that Related agree to the goals set forth by the EDC and the conditions spelled out in the Bronx Borough President's CBA.

We thank you for your attention to this very important vote.

Sincerely,

Michael Fishman, President  
SEIU Local 32 BJ

George Gresham, President  
SEIU 1199

Michael Mulgrew, President  
United Federation of Teachers

Lillian Roberts, Executive Director  
AFSCME District Council 37

Peter Ward, President  
Hotel & Motel Trades Council