

## **Testimony for Landmarks Commission – February 5, 2008**

My name is Michael Lappin. I am President of the Community Preservation Corporation (CPC) and its development subsidiary, CPC Resources. CPC Resources is the managing partner of Refinery LLC, which owns the 11 + acre Domino site.

CPC has been a constant presence in New York City's neighborhoods for the past 34 years. Our mission is to preserve and develop affordable housing and to thereby stabilize and invigorate communities. Since our founding we have been involved in the building or rebuilding of over 147,000 affordable housing units, and have invested almost \$7 billion in this effort. CPC Resources shares the mission of its parent with its focus on affordable housing as exemplified by the completion of the renovation of the 12,271-unit Parkchester complex in the Northeast Bronx in 2005, and the recently started rebuilding of the 524 unit low-income Riverdale-Osborn apartment complex in East Brooklyn.

I appreciate the opportunity to present our plans for the preservation and adaptive re-use of the landmark Refinery Complex – and to place it in the context of our overall vision for the redevelopment of the Domino site. Our goals for the project are ambitious and reflect both our own primary mission and the needs and concerns of the surrounding South Williamsburg community.

At the core of our vision for the New Domino is the creation of an economically diverse community on the 11+ acre site that strikes a balance between the public's need for affordable housing, historic preservation, and open space in a way that's financially viable. We recognize the importance of respecting the existing neighborhood's fabric – both in terms of its physical structures and in terms of the residents who have struggled to make it the vibrant place it is today. And so our vision for the Domino site includes several components, and we have worked hard to design a program that achieves a successful balance among them.

The adaptively reused Refinery will be at the center of an extension to the existing Southside residential community, a new residential neighborhood which will contain approximately 2,200 apartments – 30 percent of which (660 units) will be affordable to low and moderate-income families. The depth and level of affordability exceeds what is required on other waterfront

sites and is intended to reach lower income segments of the community than are being served elsewhere.

The master plan for the site, designed by Rafael Vinoly Architects, opens up pedestrian and visual corridors along each of the upland blocks to the East River, allowing visual and physical access to the waterfront for the first time in over a century. Additionally the plan provides a waterfront esplanade along the 1300-foot length of the site, as well as a large open space on the river-side of the Refinery. In all, we will create over 3 acres of open space, about a third of the site, all available for public use. Our proposal includes retail and community facility space as well, and we estimate that approximately 550 permanent new jobs will be created.

The components I've described – preservation, affordable housing, open space, access to the water, jobs – all matter to the community and to the City, but the primary focus remains affordable housing. The vast need for affordable housing in the neighborhood cannot be overstated. The median income of the Williamsburg community is half that of the City's (\$35,000 for a 4-person household), with housing costs and availability moving rapidly out of reach for this population. Our plan will provide 50% more affordable housing than is required elsewhere, with almost a third of those affordable units available to households earning between \$21,000 and \$25,000 per year.

Let me turn specifically to the issue of preservation. Our highly skilled architects at Beyer Blinder Belle will describe in their presentation the careful attention their approach has paid to historic detail. I would like to address just one aspect of the proposed adaptive reuse.

We are proud to have supported the landmarking of these buildings because we respect the history of Brooklyn and of this community, and because this building is a tangible reminder of that history. But let's be clear about what makes this complex so historically compelling. It is not the pristine and precise architecture of the buildings. Built essentially as a brick skin for a constantly evolving manufacturing process, the buildings were savaged repeatedly by their industrial stewards in an effort to meet the changing needs of the sugar refining industry. Tops were chopped off, holes were gouged, windows and masonry came and went. The importance of this complex, that which should be preserved, is the fact of its existence as a constantly evolving and dynamic manufacturing center.

And now the community is evolving in a different direction. The present needs are not for bigger or faster centrifuges, vats, or char-burning furnaces, but for housing, affordable housing. We are proudly proposing a striking five story modern addition to the top of the industrial structures. This addition will allow the site to flourish in a new way while still respecting and paying homage to its old incarnation. This is the best tribute we can make to what had always been a forward-looking industry. Let's see the Refinery evolve again in a way that serves the community that its hulking structure has dominated for 150 years, and that will be the greatest tribute to its former workers.

Meeting all these worthy goals requires a delicate economic balance. In a time of shrinking resources and expanding demands, we need to find ways to meet all our obligations – affordability, preservation, open space and access. None can be viewed in isolation from the other nor can they be sacrificed to achieve the other. The costs of preservation are extraordinary. Reusing the Refinery requires a costly and delicate dismantling of the entire interior of the buildings. Providing affordable housing at the income levels we hope to serve requires deep cross-subsidizing. Creating expansive open space involves turning over valuable land to the public domain.

But our plan creatively addresses this balancing act, within the height guidelines of the 2005 Greenpoint/Williamsburg rezoning. The success of the plan depends on responsible density – both in the new structures and in the preserved Refinery with its roof top addition —to create a viable economic structure that allows for the creation of such a significant amount of affordable housing while absorbing the substantial added costs of preservation.

Our overarching goal for the New Domino, with the restored Refinery as its historic centerpiece, is to build on the City's greatest legacy – providing a home where people of diverse economic and cultural backgrounds can live together in welcoming, enduring communities and thrive in their individual pursuits.

We are tremendously excited about moving forward with our Domino redevelopment proposal, and are delighted to have the support of the Landmarks community for the preservation of its central structure. We hope to continue having your support as we design a reuse of the Refinery that

meets the needs of the entire community. We want to acknowledge the collegial efforts of the staff of the landmarks commission as well as the planning and housing agencies, and look forward to finalizing the elements of our plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.