

THE NEW AMSTERDAM PUBLIC MARKET ASSOCIATION

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Testimony to Manhattan Community Board One Tuesday, October 28th, 2008

My name is Robert LaValva, and I direct the New Amsterdam Public Market Association. I am here this evening to advocate for the preservation and revival of New York's public market infrastructure. Two historic waterfront market halls at the Seaport - the *Tin Building* and the *New Market Building* - are now in danger of being lost. These buildings should be preserved intact and in place, and rededicated to incubating and supporting a regional food system. I urge Community Board One to reject the current Seaport development proposal, and offer three observations relating to this neighborhood's status as a premier Landmark of the city and the world:

First, it is extremely important to remember that the neighborhood now called the *Seaport* is but a fragment of New York's first waterfront, a district whose origins can be traced to the very foundation of this city, and which once stretched from the Battery to Corlear's Hook. In the 1960's, this priceless urban fabric was largely demolished and replaced with the high-rise, modernist towers which surround it still today.

Yet the Seaport was considered so important that it was made into a special Urban Renewal District - *which includes the New Market Building site* - where the city could use Eminent Domain specifically to preserve the neighborhood for future generations. In an equally unprecedented move, the city allowed air rights in the district to be transferred outside of its borders so that its historic scale could be maintained. To defend the Seaport's historic buildings and scale is neither anti-development nor anti-progress. Rather, it is to remember that most of the Seaport has already been demolished and rebuilt, and what remains of it must be preserved at all costs.

Second, we should consider the architectural merit of the Fulton Fish Market halls. Both structures are the last examples of a building type first constructed in New York in 1675; riverfront market halls like this could never be built again, and to demolish them or move them from their historic context is inexcusable. The Tin Building is neither a "dead end" nor "in the way" of a view corridor; rather, it *creates* a view corridor by providing a unique and pleasant backdrop to Beekman Street, much in the way that Trinity Church marks the end of Wall Street. Such backdrops are very rare in this city of grids, and those that exist need to be preserved. The New Market Building, set back from South Street, creates a magnificent and truly public setting with iconic views of the Brooklyn Bridge. Restored as a public market, it will be a much more compelling civic venue than the open space now proposed for Pier 17, which will be surrounded by chain stores and is in reality nothing more than a shopping mall disguised as a plaza.

Finally, we should consider the Seaport as an asset to be appreciated for what it has to offer. The Fulton Fish Market is a world famous institution, and its importance has been recognized by journalists, artists, photographers, writers, and eminent historians. Just this year, the Library of Congress published a monograph on public markets; the Fulton Fish Market is the only market with an entire chapter devoted solely to its history, which includes many images of the Tin Building, the New Market Building, and their predecessors. By recognizing the uniqueness of this site, and by preserving and reusing the only historic waterfront structures in this maritime district, we will transform the Seaport and fulfill its unrealized potential to be a world class civic destination for New Yorkers and visitors to our city.

There is no good reason to demolish any of the Seaport's buildings; what needs to be changed is their content.