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September 23, 2016

Esther Brunner
Mayor's Office Of Sustainability
253 Broadway – 7th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: Comment on Downtown Rockaway Redevelopment Plan (CEQR NO. 16DME010Q) Draft
Scope of Work for EIS – Remove the disposition of **Queens block 15534, lot 70**

Ms. Brunner,

I am writing to request that **Queens block 15534, lot 70** be removed from the Downtown Rockaway Redevelopment Plan prior to determining the final scope of work for the Environmental Impact Study. The Draft Plan, on page 15, describes its lease or sale to a private developer for "new as-of-right residential uses pursuant to existing R3X zoning." R3X zoning allows for the construction of single and two-family detached homes. The current zoning would allow approximately 8-10 apartments to be built here. The architects rendering in the draft do not include the new buildings on this site. The inclusion and disposition of this City-owned lot are both inconsistent with the strategy of the Redevelopment Plan. The lot is outside the targeted area and the development proposed for this site does not fit with the proposed building envelope.¹

More importantly: this land is public land. There is no reason at all for the City to transfer it to a private developer to create 10 new suburban-style market-rate housing units. A lot more people will benefit if the City keeps the site and allows it to be developed for public use by resident leaders.

The parcel should be a key asset in what will become a dense neighborhood as planned. It can be transferred to the NYC Parks Department for use as a GreenThumb garden or for the creation of a new Downtown Rockaway Park or Playground. It can be respite for young and old alike, as well as host to community composting, food production, farm markets, pop up libraries, science classes and many other overlapping community-enriching activities. None of them will be

¹ Figures in the Draft Scope do not actually illustrate the proposed disposition. Figure 13 shows the building envelope of a structure that used to be on the site but was demolished by DSNY last year. In Figure 14, the lot is shown without structures at all.

possible if we give away this precious public land. 596 Acres has facilitated the transformation of over three dozen vacant lots like this into community stewarded open spaces throughout the five boroughs. These oases provide key social infrastructure for the development of resilient communities as people get to know their neighbors share skills and build strengths. They also grow healthy food, teach science to schoolkids, divert water from our over-burdened sewers, remove tons of waste from landfill by redirecting organics into soil production via composting and provide space for cultural activities.

This comment is not a proposal for how the lot should be used. But if this lot's transfer to a private developer is approved, the community will not get the opportunity to determine the best possible use of this public asset.

I urge you to remove the disposition of **Queens block 15534, lot 70** from the Draft Scope of Scope of work for the Downtown Rockaway Redevelopment Plan so that the redevelopment of the vacant private properties in the area can proceed in parallel with community planning for the transformation of this public lot into a resource.

My organization, 596 Acres, and residents of Downtown Rockaway stand ready to facilitate a productive use of the public land at Queens block 15534, lot 70.

Thank you so much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alexis Smallwood,
Community Outreach Coordinator, Rockaway Wildfire