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For Applicants East River Fifties Alliance and Elected Officials
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Good evening. My name is Christopher Rizzo and my law firm Carter Ledyard & Milburn represents the East River Fifties Alliance in this application for a zoning text amendment in which we are joined by Borough President Gale Brewer, Councilman Ben Kallos, Councilman Dan Garodnick and State Senator Liz Krueger. ERFA is a nonprofit organization formed specifically to address flawed zoning in the far east fifties area of Manhattan. Members include 1,975 people in 285 buildings.

A zoning application initiated by so many residents and four elected officials is very, very rare. This coalition came together only because the zoning that applies in this community is so deeply flawed. It is the only remaining area of Manhattan where R10 zoning applies on mid blocks—thus allowing buildings of any height. The 900-foot tall tower proposed for East 58th Street is just the tip of the iceberg. To add insult to injury, current zoning allows a 20% floor area bonus for providing less than 5% affordable housing.

The elected officials and ERFA have assembled an expert team to work on this application. Doug Woodward and Sandy Hornick are leading urban planners and will provide the details of the application in a moment. In a nutshell it would accomplish two things:

1. The zoning would provide a height cap of 210 feet on narrow streets and 235 feet on wide streets while leaving the base floor area ratio of 10 in place.
2. The zoning would provide a carefully crafted floor area bonus to incentivize affordable housing production. In exchange for providing about 13% of the floor area for affordable housing, developers would be entitled to a 3 FAR bonus and a height limit of 260 feet. The 3 FAR bonus would be comprised of up to 2 FAR of residential space and 1 FAR of community facility space.

Please know that we started our planning process seeking lower height limits, a wider rezoning area and more aggressive affordable housing requirements. We came to the current proposal after almost two years of tough conversations with the Department of City Planning staff. The height limits reflect the overwhelming character of the community where at most 9 or 10 existing buildings would exceed the height limit. And the affordable housing bonus is entirely based on the City's existing Inclusionary Housing Designated Area program, which has produced 7,000 units of affordable housing in about 50 mapped areas around the City. The analysis in the environmental assessment for this application shows that it would produce more affordable housing over existing zoning. But the assessment itself underestimates the benefit of this application because it cannot acknowledge what we all know--super tall towers produce almost only large, expensive apartments that do nothing to address the City's pressing housing shortage.

As some of you know, the City Planning Commission chairwoman has publicly expressed concerns about this application. We will address each of those concerns in this presentation. We are continuing to have conversations with her staff about this application and ways to vary it to address the Commission's desires and concerns. We need a strong vote from the Community Board to turn the commissioners around and influence these conversations. I hope we can earn that vote tonight and in the public meetings that will follow over the next 15 days.