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Contact: Jack Friedman (718) 898-8500

## Queens Chamber to NYC Regional EDC: Build A Convention Center in Queens

Queens Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Jack Friedman delivered the following testimony during the public session portion of the NYC Regional Economic Development Council meeting held today (Tuesday, October 4, 2011) at York College .

Good morning members of the New York City Regional Economic Council. My name is Jack Friedman and I am the Executive Director of the Queens Chamber of Commerce, an organization that represents over 1,200 businesses and organizations doing business in and around Queens County. I would first like to thank you for this opportunity to weigh in on how the inclusion of a convention center in Queens as a priority project in the Regional Five Year plan would impact our borough, our City's economy and the economy of the entire region.

Let me start by saying that the idea of bringing a first-class convention center to Queens is not a new idea, in fact the Queens Chamber of Commerce with a grant from New York City, conducted a detailed analysis and study more than eight years ago on the viability and potential benefits of such a plan. The report looked at many factors and many areas around Queens and concluded that there most definitely was a need for such a venue, that a convention center would bring the county much needed jobs and economic growth and that the best place for the center would be at Willets Point. Little has changed in the past eight years other than the need for a regional convention center has only grown and demand has never been greater.

Lets look at some facts. New York City is woefully behind other Cities across the Nation when it comes to convention space. In Chicago, there are three major convention centers, McCormick Place, Rosemont and Navy Pier. McCormick, the largest in the nation has a combined 2.3 million square feet with 1.2 million square feet on one level. Rosemont has six exhibit halls that combine for over 800,000 square feet and an additional 92,000 square feet of conference center and meeting rooms. Navy Pier boasts 170,000 square feet with an additional 39 meeting rooms and a rooftop reception area. Three different sized convention and exhibition areas, serving different needs to the same Chicago community. New York, in comparison has just the Javits Center at 675,000 square feet and an additional 80,000 square feet planned in the next couple of years. This is woefully inadequate and New York City is missing a great opportunity.

Look at Queens. We host the two major airports for the New York Metropolitan area. We boast mass transit service to Manhattan, the other boroughs and Long Island via the Long Island railroad and NYC subway and busses. The Willets Point location, in particular, is a transit hub, joining all those forms of transportation, close proximity to the airports, Parking from CitiField, access to major highways and expressways and ability to use alternative types of transportation like ferry service from the nearby Willets Point Marina. Imagine what a convention center would do to boost Queens' economy when you consider that today, tourists and visitors to our

great City are forced to bypass our borough and instead spend their travel and business dollars solely in Manhattan, close to our only Convention venue.

The Javits Center is large and by all accounts very expensive. It was poorly designed and fails to meet the needs of most convention planners. It ranks 19th, nationwide in popularity. The cost of exhibiting there and of spending time in the immediate area is prohibitive. Queens offers a great option. The master plan for Willets Point has always included a footprint for a 400,000 square foot convention center. Our study showed that if we build it, they will come. In Buffalo, New York, work was recently completed on upgrading the Buffalo-Niagara Convention Center. This 117,000 square foot facility, in 2010 boasted over 108 events, was used more than 197 nights during the year and generated over 14,000 hotel night stays directly from events at the Center. During these recessionary times, Buffalo saw record-breaking years for hotel occupancy and revenues. Imagine what that would translate into for a venue for Queens and as an alternative to Javits.

Please, do not let this opportunity pass. The travel and tourism industry is one of Queen's most promising growth industries. We are perfectly suited to host such a site and have a unique opportunity with the development of Willets Point. It should be included in the Regional plan and I contend that a convention center at Willets Point will be the areas greatest economic generator of new business, jobs, and incremental tax revenue. Please consider its inclusion in New York City's Regional plan

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[Editor's note: Queens Chamber of Commerce President Carol Conslato serves on the council.]

About the Chamber: Currently celebrating its [Centennial](#), the Queens Chamber of Commerce represents thousands of businesses and firms of all sizes that do business from and/ or in our vibrant borough. On behalf of its 1,200 members, collectively employing 500,000 residents of Queens County, the Chamber through its programs and advocacy, works to promote the general welfare of the Borough of Queens and to foster its commerce.