

**Statement of Mayor Noam Bramson**  
**City Council Vote on the Forest City Proposal for Echo Bay**  
**November 2013**

The debate surrounding Echo Bay has been intense. At times it's almost seemed as though the project had become a symbol of larger disputes and divisions, rather than a specific plan with specific features. So let me try to bring the discussion back to the actual proposal before us and offer three reasons why I am voting yes.

Number one, planning.

This proposal advances critical objectives for our waterfront.

This proposal would clean up a nearly ten-acre area that is today contaminated and inaccessible, and devote more than half of the land, including the entire shoreline, to public use and enjoyment, including the largest new park in New Rochelle in more than a generation. And it would also provide the energy of restaurants and retail on what is now a nearly dead portion of East Main Street.

This proposal would pay for public improvements by allowing private development that is respectful of its surroundings in scale and character.

This proposal is smaller than in 2007 because economic conditions have changed since then and because we have learned from experience. Nonetheless, it would create a core of successful investment that could serve as a catalyst for surrounding properties and would make it easier to achieve a larger transformation of the Echo Bay area.

Number two, money.

Our own, independent, expert analysis concludes that this is a very good deal and a significant winner for taxpayers.

In terms of one-time impacts, under this proposal, our community would receive cash payments or fees totaling about \$9 million, plus in-kind benefits and assets worth about \$8.5 million, a total of \$17.5 million.

In exchange, we would transfer about 2/3 of a property that has been independently appraised at \$5.7 million in its entirety . . . so figure about \$4 million for the transferred portion.

That's a net one-time benefit of \$13.5 million.

In terms of annual impacts, under this proposal, the various taxing entities covering New Rochelle would receive about \$1.5 million in taxes and payments every year, while expending about \$650,000 in annual service costs, for a net benefit each year of about \$850,000.

Over 20 years, those annual benefits, putting aside inflation and escalators, add up to about \$17,000,000.

Take the annual and one-time benefits, put them together, and the total value of this proposal for taxpayers is a little over \$30 million. And after twenty years, even more.

Number three, process.

About 30 years ago, the City adopted an urban renewal plan for Echo Bay.

About 10 years ago, hundreds of residents participated in an open, inclusive community planning process to articulate specific goals.

About 7 years ago, the Council used those goals as the basis for issuing requests for development partners, and then unanimously selected Forest City Residential, based primarily on Forest City's ability to stick with the site through economic ups and downs.

In the time since, through two local elections and a national recession, we have slowly made progress. The developer has completed an environmental review. And our staff has patiently negotiated the terms of a public-private partnership, including elements that directly respond to various community concerns, and others that correct past mistakes, such as a creative and effective solution for addressing public school costs.

In other words, the action before us now is the concluding step of a careful, methodical process aimed at first defining and then achieving our own community's goals. When it comes to big decisions, this sort of orderly, step-by-step is important and should be valued.

For all of these reasons, and others I could list, I am disappointed by the Council's vote tonight, but I respect that others have weighed the pros and cons and come to a different conclusion. And once a choice is made, it is time to move on.

The challenge before us now is to apply the lessons of this experience to our next steps. So to balance out my three explanations for past support, let me make three suggestions for future action.

First, let's conduct every public debate as though our children were watching.

Any significant development – for that matter, any significant public action – brings with it the potential for controversy. So we should expect and welcome honest disagreements.

But how we express those disagreements sends a message to the larger world, including potential investors, about who we are and how we work.

Especially when it comes to big choices, we should demonstrate the civility, professionalism, commitment to truth, and mutual respect of which we are all capable and which put New Rochelle's best foot forward.

Second, let us set the right balance between vision and realism.

This requires us to walk a path with a pitfall on each side.

One pitfall is low expectations, accepting less than we could achieve with greater effort. For any major development, we should ask whether it truly advances our community's essential interests, whether it truly makes New Rochelle a better place, and whether it truly surpasses other available opportunities. Only developments that meet each of these tests are worthy of our support.

The other pitfall is wishful thinking, allowing the perfect to be the enemy of the good. If we wait for an ideal project, the chances are that we will wait forever. And insisting on just exactly the right form of change, with no trade-offs or compromises, succeeds only in cementing the status quo.

The test, in the end, is what we actually accomplish.

Lastly, let us prove worthy of trust.

The trust of the people we represent, which we earn through openness to criticism, sharing of information, good judgment, and a commitment to our responsibilities.

The trust of our partners in business, which is vital to New Rochelle's investment climate and to our hopes for a stronger economy.

The trust of each other, which is the essential basis for compromise, for negotiation, and for our ability to work together and plan ahead.

We should make our commitments carefully, and then honor those commitments to the very best of our ability.

To conclude, I've had my chance to advance a proposal, and I accept the fact that my suggestion did not carry the day. I think it is only right that I now give colleagues, who had a different view on this issue, their chance to put forward specific alternatives, and to recommend the next course of action for Echo Bay and the City Yard.

I am looking forward to hearing your suggestions and priorities, so that we can make the most of the opportunities before us.

Thank you for listening. And, again, I vote yes.