

## Q & A: How they would do Hudson Yards

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The five proposals on the table to remake the Hudson Yards area, the biggest remaining frontier of undeveloped Manhattan land, have been described as pie-in-the-sky by many who think there's no chance the MTA will award the project to any one bidder.

This month, *The Real Deal's* C. J. Hughes talked to urban planners, architects, developers and New York historians to get their take on the current proposals and what the bids have failed to address.

One of the experts raised concerns that the proposals "are turning Manhattan into a monoculture of office towers and residential towers." Another praised the proposals, noting that nothing would get torn down, nobody would be displaced, and the addition of housing would help lower residential costs across the city.

While Phoenix or Dallas might shrug off a 26-acre site, in dense Manhattan, its size and empty, blank-slate status make it a developer's dream. The possibilities of what to do with it are endless. And although these proposals blend elements from earlier large-scale New York developments like Rockefeller Center, Riverside South and Battery Park City, the final version will likely look a bit different.

Here's what our panel of experts had to say about a project that is going to reshape the far West Side and leave this generation's development mark on the city's landscape.

**André Balazs** hotelier, the Standard New York, which straddles the High Line

*Some of the proposals would scrap much of the elevated High Line. Thoughts?*

To allow people to travel from the future Whitney Museum on West 11th Street up to the Hudson Yards is a wildly unique urban opportunity. It's important to circulate people through the site to avoid ghettoizing it, so you don't end up with something isolated and monolithic, like Trump's development over the other West Side railyards. Also, anything that has a singular use risks turning into a ghetto.

One aspect of the plans that perhaps hasn't gotten as much attention is how much affordable housing there should be.

I think in general, any neighborhood that gets discovered already has an organic element

of affordable housing, like Soho or the Meatpacking District, [with] people who are pioneers. When they get pushed out, that's when the neighborhood really collapses. For a socially interesting urban setting, affordable housing is very important.

**Elliott Sclar** head of Columbia University's Center for Sustainable Urban Development

*What are your general concerns about the five proposals?*

These types of mega-developments are turning Manhattan into a monoculture of office towers and residential towers, but the strength of New York is that it was always diverse. New York needs to be a place where it can incubate ideas, where artists and writers can come and [support] small businesses.

*What would you put there?*

It depends on what I paid for it. [But] I would put up buildings that gradually step up from the river, unlike Riverside South, where they've done it the other way around. In Rockefeller Center, they added open space to make it a penetrable part of Midtown; you can walk in and out from many angles.

*Will Hudson Yards come to fruition?*

We are playing a game of beat the clock in terms of the economy, and it seems like all the huge projects come at the end of a cycle, like the Empire State Building. They are like a fireworks finale, and we're probably at that finale point right now.

**Jeff Katz** CEO, Sherwood Equities; planning 2.3 million-square-foot commercial tower at Tenth Avenue and West 35th Street

*You assembled lots in this area more than a decade ago. Why did you bet on this neighborhood?*

It's a natural continuation of the city's central business district, which is New York's golden goose. Times Square's revival had to happen first, and this area required rezoning and subway extension. It's not going to take 10 minutes to happen. When Lincoln Center was developed, they said it was going to take five years, and it took much longer. But Hudson Yards could be like London's Canary Wharf, though even better.

*Do you have any concerns how Hudson Yards will connect to the rest of the city?*

The planning department has been superb in determining the density of the project and the size of the street wall. In general, there's a terrific mix of commercial and residential here. And we're starting from scratch. This is not a neighborhood in transition like the Upper West Side was at one time. This is a blank slate.

**Kenneth Jackson** history professor, Columbia University; editor, *The Encyclopedia of*

*New York City; co-editor, Robert Moses and the Modern City; author of Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*

*Do you believe in the gist of the five proposals?*

Definitely. Nothing's getting torn down here and no one will be displaced. And more housing units should lead to lower prices across the city; it's a basic supply-and-demand relationship. Whatever ends up there, it's bound to be an improvement over a railroad yard.

*How would you improve the plans?*

I think there needs to be an extra stop for the 7 train. [It currently stops at Times Square, and would be extended to Eleventh Avenue and West 34th Street, with no stops in between.] This is a problem in Chicago: too much space between stops. Another challenge is to create street life with delis, grocery stores and movie theaters, the kinds of things that Jane Jacobs talked about. Trump's Riverside South project doesn't have that. Where do I walk in and buy a Pepsi over there?

**Dean Maltz** partner, Shigeru Ban Architects, a firm that has vied in design competitions for the World Trade Center Memorial and the Olympic Games

*What would you build over the railyards?*

In the 1980s I used to work at 38th and Tenth, but never gave the area much thought until the stadium proposal. These new developments could be like Rockefeller Center, where they took 11 acres and created a fantastic civic space. That needs to be there. It's not in Times Square, so people have to walk their dogs in Bryant Park. If the open space is more commercial in nature than residential, it will be a missed opportunity.

*The Tishman/Morgan Stanley plan calls for 10 million square feet of office space, while Durst/Vornado would build 5.4 million. What's your call?*

I would say 6 to 8 million square feet of office space, plus another few million of retail. I think big-box tenants will probably come in – not Wal-Mart, but the kinds of stores you see in Herald Square, like H & M. I would also keep the High Line intact.

**Mitchell Moss** urban planning professor, NYU; co-chaired the Group of 35 in 2001, which recommended developing a far West Side business district

*With much talk of a recession, is the time right to build here?*

The mere fact that two major media companies [News Corporation and Condé Nast] are willing to relocate to the Hudson Yards is an indication of how strong New York is as a global provider of information. Even while the financial sector is going through its own mini-crisis, the information industries are thriving.

*What do you think of the roughly 50-50 ratio between apartments and offices?*

Midtown has residential mixed with commercial. People like to live near where they work. We don't want spend 45 minutes each morning on the highway.

*What about the project's vertical scale?*

Look, the same people who criticize the tall scale are the same people who were unhappy with a 300-foot stadium. It's ironic. Now they will end up with taller structures. The problem with Jane Jacobs is that the model she had in mind was Greenwich Village, but most people don't live in Greenwich Village. There are three things that make New York special: the energy on the sidewalk, the quality of the food and the height of the buildings.

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