
Made in Midtown Gets Under Way

By Rosemary Feitelberg

IN AN EFFORT TO WELCOME MORE PARTIES to the ongoing debate about the New York garment center's future, the Council of Fashion Designers of America and the Design Trust for Public Space have teamed up to commission a comprehensive study of the fashion industry's presence in the neighborhood and its place in the city's creative economy.

Called "Made in Midtown," the study has two tracks and is expected to be completed in about six months. The first involves interview-

the winning proposal that was selected from 16 submissions. "All the debates end up being about economics. Somebody has to argue for culture and creativity. Otherwise, we are the poorer for it," Teng said. "The cultural heritage of this city is locked into this district."

During an interview Wednesday, they said the garment district debate should not be reduced to the going rate for commercial real estate. All parties need to take into account the economic impact that any changes would bring, especially in relation to the area's jobs and diversity. In addition, the city's five fashion-oriented schools are integral to the infrastructure.

The garment center employs 175,000 people and provides \$10 billion in wages, and \$1.6 billion in tax revenues. In recent months, city officials have recommended containing the bulk of the industry's tenants to an Eighth Avenue building that has

about 270,000 square feet. Teng and Schwartz said more than two million square feet is needed, according to another survey completed by Identity Map Co. Rezoning could potentially wipe out many garment workers' jobs and "the city has no plans to retrain those workers," Schwartz said. "If the manufacturing component is removed, everything that rests on top of it will be jeopardized."

Steven Kolb, the CFDA's executive director, said, "Given the potential impact of rezoning on the neighborhood we felt an impartial group, like Design Trust, would bring a fresh perspective to the conversation for all stakeholders."

Noting that the Design Trust for Public Space is also working on the nation's first city-wide plan for urban agriculture, Teng said, "People need to be educated about how things arrive on their plates, and now they need to learn how things wind up on their backs."

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— Joerg Schwartz

ing designers, factory workers, fashion school deans and other industry stakeholders in the garment district, Sunset Park, Brooklyn, and other clusters of fashion production to determine what works, what doesn't and what would make the infrastructure more visible and accessible to the broader public. Results will be posted on the trust's Web site, designtrust.org.

The second track will focus on a feasibility study to try to figure out if the fashion industry's core needs to remain in Midtown. Real estate trends, zoning regulations and business retention initiatives will be among the factors taken into account before a report is presented to city agencies and other interested parties. Design Trust, a nonprofit dedicated to improving public life for all New Yorkers, is financing the project through donor outreach. Ideally, the group aims to use the Made in Midtown concept in other cities, according to Yeohlee Teng and architect Joerg Schwartz, who wrote

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