

metro®

NEW YORK • MONDAY, JANUARY 30, 2006 • WWW.METRO.US

JASPER GOLDMAN
letters@metro.us



LET'S SAVE BRONX TERMINAL MARKET

If you haven't been there before, go visit the Bronx Terminal Market at 149th Street sometime in the next few weeks. Even though its previous owner allowed it to fall into disrepair, it's still one of the most fascinating places in the city; it's one of the few places where you can buy goat's meat, cow skins, and other produce that you won't find in Whole Foods. Originally developed in the early 20th century as a municipal wholesale market, it was expanded by Mayor LaGuardia in the 1930s and later served as a model for similar markets across the country. Today, it provides a livelihood for over 700 people who supply bodegas, supermarkets, and residents from all over the city. It unquestionably contributes to the diversity that makes this city great. But sadly, unless the city acts to save the market this week, it will have a death sentence on it.

What's happened is that the city invited a developer, the Related Companies, to take over the lease of the city-owned market. Related has proposed a new, suburban-style mall for the site. Even though the parcel is large, the company claims that it's not possible for the merchants to coexist with the new mall. So far, the city has failed to offer the merchants a new home where they can all be together, which is critical for the market to survive. And time is running out;

"The Bronx is one of the most distinctive places in the country and new development needs to respect its culture, history and urban nature."

the City Council will vote Wednesday on the application by Related to build its new mall.

Fortunately, there's one option on the table that's beneficial to all parties. Irwin Cohen, the developer behind Chelsea Market, has proposed constructing a new market on a city-owned parcel across from the Major Deegan Expressway and the existing

market. The so-called "Velodrome site" — previously part of the 2012 Olympics bid — could hold both a new facility for the merchants and a badly needed waterfront park. Properly designed, the new facility would actually draw people to the waterfront and activate the park. If the City Council wants to give a big win to New Yorkers, they'll push Mayor Bloomberg to dedicate a piece of land to save Bronx Terminal Market.

And the Council doesn't have to stop there. Related's proposed mall sadly has some of the worst aspects of suburban design, including street-deadening blank walls, an eyesore of a six-story parking garage, and signs up to 2,500 square feet — five times larger than the regulations normally permit. And all but one of the historic buildings will be demolished. The Council could dramatically improve the project by insisting that the parking be placed behind active street facades; that quality architecture rather than enormous signage announces the presence of the mall; and that pedestrian entrances and streetlife-generating activity are put on the streets facing the neighborhood. They could also insist that more of the historic buildings are preserved and that small scale, locally-owned retail that serves the surrounding neighborhoods have a guaranteed place in the mall, so it's more than a home to big box retailers. The Bronx is one of the most distinctive places in the country and new development needs to respect, not dismantle, its culture, history and urban nature. If the City Council steps up to the plate next week, they can make sure everybody wins by ensuring a better than ever Bronx Terminal Market, a new urban shopping center, and a revitalized South Bronx.

→ JASPER GOLDMAN is a policy analyst at the Municipal Art Society, a nonprofit organization advocating for a more livable New York City.