

Via email:

November 8, 2023

Mayor Ravinder S. Bhalla
City of Hoboken
94 Washington Street
Hoboken, NJ 07030

Mayor Bhalla,

I am writing to urge you to advocate clearly, strongly and in writing, for the State to use all means legally at its disposal to obtain the outstanding Rebuild by Design easements in Jersey City as quickly as possible, so that the final impediments to the completion of this critical project are resolved.

First, let me provide some background so you better understand why I am advocating so strongly at this time. Until recently, I assumed, based on the narrative provided to the public, that RBD was fully on track. I was excited to read that the contract for the entire project, North and South, had been awarded and that construction was about to start.

Given that, I was quite surprised when I recently learned that the Jersey City easements had still not been obtained. I was further surprised to learn that Mayor Fulop, who to my knowledge had never before raised any reservations about the project in the 9 years since the grant was awarded, was now opposing it unless his demands relating to a proposed new light rail station on 18th Street in Jersey City were met.

At the North End groundbreaking, I asked State officials about it. They confirmed that the JC easements had not been obtained.

Soon afterwards, I was interviewed by Michael Kimmelman of the *New York Times* in connection with a story he was writing about Hoboken's investments in green infrastructure. I mentioned my concerns about the Jersey City easements. He reached out to Hoboken, Jersey City and the DEP, all of whom provided statements that Mr. Kimmelman shared with me in full, even though the full statements were not included in his story. These statements helped me better understand what was happening behind the scenes, and greatly increased my concerns that there remained a very real risk to completion of the project.

This is what led to my tweets to you and Mayor Fulop last week. The *Hudson County View* story, sparked by my tweets, elicited additional statements from Hoboken and Jersey City. The

responses from the spokespeople for Jersey City and Hoboken made me even more concerned. My additional statement to HCV was provided only after I was informed of the extremely concerning content of Hoboken's statement. Hoboken's statement appeared to actually support Mayor Fulop's withholding of the easements, despite the obvious enormous negative ramifications for Hoboken residents.

In addition, Jersey City's statement to *HCV* inaccurately claimed that RBD would "increase flood risks to Jersey City." Rather than refute this factually incorrect claim, Hoboken's statement seemed to reinforce it. The extensive modeling done in connection with the design of the project, which Caleb Stratton, Hoboken's Chief Resiliency Officer, is well versed in, clearly establishes that flood risk to Jersey City (including vital JCMUA infrastructure) would be reduced. Based on that modeling, the DEP Fact Sheet notes:

"In addition to providing flood risk reduction to Hoboken and neighboring areas of Jersey City... the Resist Structure will also protect critical infrastructure...including...Jersey City Municipal Utility Authority Infrastructure..."

It is important that Mayor Fulop's inaccurate narrative be corrected to reflect the contrary conclusion confirmed by the actual data.

You are appropriately an advocate for Hoboken, not for Mayor Fulop or Jersey City. This is a State project. The State of New Jersey is the final decision maker. Therefore, it is critical that all of Hoboken's elected officials, led by you, Hoboken's Mayor, strongly advocate to the State on behalf of Hoboken's vital interests.

I urge you to advocate, in writing, for the outstanding issues to be promptly resolved one way or another as soon as possible. Whether those issues are resolved to Mayor Fulop's satisfaction is for the State to decide. In my opinion, Hoboken's sole interest ought to be that, one way or another, using all the tools legally at the State's disposal, the easements are obtained by the State ASAP. The State is far more likely to act if it clearly understands that this is Hoboken's position.

I have written a strong letter to Governor Murphy, and my understanding is that it was well received. I have an excellent relationship with the Governor, but I am no longer the Mayor of Hoboken. It is critical that Governor Murphy hears from you, promptly, forcefully and in writing, urging that this issue be expeditiously resolved.

I understand that you support public transportation and think an additional light rail station on 18th Street in Jersey City would be beneficial. I do too. But this unrelated matter cannot be allowed to jeopardize or obstruct RBD. The removal of impediments to the completion of RBD is crucial to the health and safety of Hoboken residents. The residents exposed to severe flood risk if the Southern alignment is not completed includes Hoboken's most vulnerable residents in the HHA and senior buildings.

In my opinion, strong public advocacy would be beneficial as well as a letter to the Governor. In addition to your own voice, the City Council could pass a resolution making clear that the City speaks with a unified voice, urging that the State do whatever is necessary to expeditiously obtain the Jersey City easements, including the use of eminent domain if necessary.

You and I have a long history of working together in the best interests of Hoboken. I hope that you will consider my suggestions so that we can do so again and get this project fully on track.

Sincerely,

Dawn Zimmer

cc: Hoboken City Council

City Council Runoff Candidates Rafi Cordova and Paul Presinzano