

COMMUNITY BOARD 12 - MANHATTAN
LAND USE COMMITTEE- MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, February 2, 2022 (Virtual via Zoom)

Committee Members Present

Wayne Benjamin, Chair
Tanya Bonner, Assistant Chair
James Berlin
Steve Simon

Committee Members Absent

Joel Abreu

Board Members Present

Public Members Present

Vivian Ducat

Public Members Absent

Staff: Paola Garcia, Community Coordinator

Guests: Gabriella Barnstone; Alexander Campos (Hispanic Society of America); Laurie Tobias-Cohen (Office of Congressman Adriano Espaillat); Derek Dandurand (Shawmut Design and Construction); Adam Fran; Eric Hahn (Colliers); Loretta Henke; Tom Hurwitz; Danielle Lopez; Margaret Connors McQuade (Hispanic Society of America);Oliva Olmos (DCP); Kate Reggev (Beyer Blinder Belle Architects and Planners); Annie White (DCP)

1. The meeting of the Land Use Committee (“Land Use” or the “Committee”) of Community Board 12 Manhattan (“CB12M” or the “Board”) was called to order at 7:05 p.m. Committee Chair Wayne Benjamin announced a change in the order of the agenda, with the Hispanic Society Museum & Library presenting first due to the panelists for the first item of the agenda not yet in attendance. Benjamin opened the meeting by welcoming everyone, and with Committee members introducing themselves.
2. **Hispanic Society of America (Accessibility updates, Signage Project, Rooftop Bulkheads and Equipment)**
Margaret Connors McQuade, Deputy Director of the Hispanic Society of America (the “Hispanic Society” or “HSA”), opened the presentation. McQuade said the focus of the presentation is the Hispanic Society’s current plans for modifications to its facilities that will be presented to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC). As the Hispanic Society, on Broadway between West 155th and 156th Streets, is located within the Audubon Terrace Historic District, a separate historic district next to the Audubon Park Historic District, any changes must be approved by the LPC. The goals of the proposed changes are to have universal accessibility to its buildings and to reopen the main building and the Sorolla Gallery as they had been closed due to renovations. McQuade said there are a series of terraces that are not accessible to everyone, and the renovations will include an additional elevator and lifts. Additionally, the presentation will address the renovation of the East Building and bringing air conditioning to the buildings.

Kate Reggev, an architect, historian and project manager with HSA’s architect, Beyer Blinder Belle, continued the presentation by discussing accessibility issues that will be addressed with the renovations. Reggev said there are three components to the renovations:

A. Accessibility

Reggev said the Hispanic Society campus is formed around terraces that are at different levels accessible by steps and that only one level of terrace is accessible. The proposal involves installing inclining platform lifts that will take people from the first steps up to wrought iron fences at the top and building a vertical lift at the main museum building entrance. A section of the wrought iron fence, which is not original to the complex, having been built sometime in the 1950s, will be modified to create an operable gate to facilitate the wheelchair lift. Visuals were shown illustrating how the renovations would look after completion.

B. East Building Roofscape

Reggev said the goal is to make the East Building, currently used for storage, useable for museum operations. Originally, it was the Museum of the American Indian and was designed to look like a twin to the former American Geographical Society building (now Boricua College). The building is not air conditioned. In order to bring the building back online, new mechanical equipment will be installed on the roof that will serve a conservation studio for the entire museum on the fourth floor of the building. A new elevator will be installed that can accommodate wheelchairs and large works of art. Reggev said the materials and details used for the renovations will be consistent with the existing materials and detail. Two existing pieces of rooftop equipment, which are partially visible from the street, will be removed and new mechanical equipment will be installed. The new equipment will be placed to reduce to the greatest extent possible its visibility from the street. Illustrations were shown of the completed renovations. Reggev also showed photographs of a sight line study, showing that the mechanical equipment and elevator bulkhead are hard to see from a distance.

C. Exterior Signage

Reggev said there is currently very limited signage to the East Building. The Hispanic Society would like to do something more permanent, with flexibility to change when new exhibitions open. This includes a single banner on the south façade in the last bay. On the north side, three symmetrical banners will be centered over the entry. On the east side, a single banner will be placed in the southernmost corner. On the front fence on Broadway, a three-dimensional sign will be attached that would be visible to the public walking by along Broadway. Photos were shown of the street view of the proposed signage. Reggev said the banners are similar to the signage at other museums in the city that are landmarked and subject to LPC review.

Benjamin asked if they had considered screening the mechanical equipment so that they are seen as an intended design element and also asked if HSA is being rebranded as the Hispanic Museum and Library, based on the new wording on the proposed signage. Reggev said it was found that screening the equipment made it more visible because of how low the equipment is. McQuade said the rebranding actually occurred several years ago, as reflected on its website. Legally the name of the institution remains the Hispanic Society of America. However, because it is often assumed that the institution is a private club or society as opposed to a museum and library that is free and open to the public, it is operating under the name the Hispanic Museum and Library. HSA is working hard to be more engaged with the wider community and be known as a museum and library that is free to the public. Committee Member Vivian Ducat asked if work was currently being done because she can see activity from her window that looks onto the Terrace. McQuade said work is not being done, but that LPC requires a mock-up of what renovations will look like as part of the application process and that photographs were being taken to prepare the mock-up. Committee Member Steve Simon said the rebranding is a great idea to make clear it is a museum and library, along with the banners and signage, and feels the renovations will have minimal impact.

Reggev said they are seeking a resolution from the Community Board, as they will be presenting to LPC in a Public Hearing on March 1, 2022. Simon moved a resolution in support of the proposed project, including the modifications on the roof, banners, and signage, and asking that LPC approve it as well. Berlin seconded the motion. The Committee vote was as follows:

	<u>For</u>	<u>Against</u>	<u>Abstaining</u>
LU Committee			
Members	5	0	0
Board Members	0	0	0
Members of the Public	5	0	0

3. Introduction to Olivia Olmos, new DCP Primary Planner Liaison for CB12M

Annie White (of DCP) introduced Olivia Olmos, who is the new CB12M Liaison for DCP. White noted that Olmos will be filling the shoes of Ryan Cote, who previously was in that role. Olmos said she previously worked for Southern California Association of Nonprofit Housing, where she worked in nonprofit development of affordable housing. She said she is interested in smart neighborhood growth that preserves neighborhood character.

Benjamin asked about her review of the Board's planning and zoning priorities. Olmos said she is reviewing rents, public open ~~spaces~~space, and public investment over the last decade. Benjamin recommended she review the district-wide Neighborhood Planning and Land Use study completed in 2007/2008, which is linked on the Board's website, to understand more about those priorities.

Simon asked if Dan Garodnick, the new Director of the DCP, had started working yet. White said that former DCP Director Anita Laremont's term had ended and that Garodnick will be starting that following Monday. Simon asked about Laremont's approving the FRESH application for 4650 Broadway, to which the Board was opposed because of concerns about more density, potential shading of Fort Tryon Park and the lack of proof that there is a dearth of supermarkets providing fresh produce in that area and wondered if this opposition could be relayed to the new leadership. White said the Director's review and approval of FRESH applications is constrained by certain findings, but that the resolution was shared with Olivia. Benjamin suggested that DCP consider further modifications to the guidelines for the FRESH Program to include an analysis of the proximity of other supermarkets that provide fresh produce in relation to the site of a proposed FRESH supermarket in making decisions about FRESH applications.

4. Updated Training Needs – Land Use and Zoning

Benjamin stated it was important for the Committee to discuss updated training needs on Land Use and Zoning. Benjamin wondered if it was possible for DCP to conduct trainings in Land Use 101 and Advanced Land Use in a future Committee meeting. White said she will look into the schedule of basic Land Use trainings. Benjamin said more should be added regarding the Buildings Department process in those trainings, as there is not a distinction between zoning regulations and approvals and building code regulations and approvals. White said this is a great idea.

5. Old Business (None)

6. New Business

- A. Benjamin noted that he had been emailed a draft resolution by Congressman Adriano Espaillat's office honoring the Harlem Renaissance as part celebrating Black History Month that would be presented to Congress on February 9th and was asked to provide feedback. Benjamin requested the Congressman's office allow more time for comments so the Committee members could also provide feedback. The request for more time was granted; comments are due to the Congressman's office on February 4th. Benjamin said he would inquire with the Congressman's office on its plans to outreach to other stakeholders for their comments.
- B. Benjamin emailed the Committee an email thread sent by Board Member Liz Ritter from community members who are opposed to a project on a vacant lot next to 205/207 Cabrini Boulevard. Gabriella Barnstone spoke on behalf of the group, which is concerned with the construction of a 79-foot-tall building on a site covered with Manhattan schist that rises above ground level. She said the concern is not about aesthetics but about safety. She said the lot is privately owned and building plans have been approved. She said excavation work by the previous owner caused cracks in the adjacent building foundations and retaining walls, and that the new owner had already been fined for unsafe excavation around the retaining wall without a permit. Barnstone asked what the Board can do to ensure the safety of their building.

Benjamin said if work is being done without a permit, to alert the Board's District Manager so he can file a complaint with the Buildings Department. He said he believes this is on the District Manager's agenda to discuss with DOB at the next District Service Cabinet meeting. He also suggested looping in the Manhattan Borough President and the Council ~~Member~~Member, so they are also aware of the problem and community concerns.

A motion to adjourn was made by Berlin and seconded by Simon. The meeting was adjourned at 8:43 p.m.

Minutes prepared ~~by~~by Tanya Bonner