

COMMUNITY BOARD 12- MANHATTAN

LAND USE COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

October 12, 2022

Committee Members Present

Wayne Benjamin, Chair
Tanya Bonner, Asst. Chair
Jim Berlin
Kimberly McCoy
James Bosley
Steve Simon

Committee Members Absent

Daniel Bonilla (Excused)
Ayisha Oglivie (Excused)

Board Members Present

Bruce Robertson

Public Member Present

Vivian Ducat

Public Member Absent

Staff: Paola Garcia

Guests: Olivia Olmos – Department of City Planning (DCP), Lara Merida – DCP, Jose Trucios – DCP, Council Member Shaun Abreu, Mike Fitelson, Karla Fisk, Denise Canniff, Loretta Henke, David Thom, Jeanie Dubnau, Ted Freed, Bernard Grobman

1. **Call to Order.** The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM. Land Use Committee (“Land Use” or the “Committee”) Chair Wayne Benjamin introduced Committee and Board members and welcomed guests. He welcomed James Bosley as a new member of the Committee. Mr. Bosley is a 20-year resident of Inwood and the founder of the Up Theater Company.
2. **Urban Land Institute’s September 2022 Urban Planning Workshop.** Committee members Vivian Ducat and Tanya Bonner briefed the Committee on their experience participating in the ULI-sponsored planning workshop. They stated it was an intensive and very exciting experience that opened their eyes to the challenges encountered in advancing development projects, obtaining buy-in from stakeholders, and finding a happy medium between opposing interests. Their team won the workshop’s competition and they believe one key reason may have been because theirs was the only team that retained a homeless shelter in the scope of the development project – they worked hard to meet all community needs. Tanya and Vivian also stated that the workshop helped them to better understand the kind of questions to ask when projects come before Land Use.
3. **DCP’s Equitable Development Data Tool.** Olivia Olmos, DCP liaison, was joined by Jose Turcios and Lara Merida, both also from DCP, to present the Equitable Development Data Tool (EDDT), an interactive, online data resource created by DCP and the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (“HPD”) to help navigate challenging conversations about housing affordability, displacement, and racial equity in NYC. It includes over 60 indicators at the neighborhood, borough, and city-wide scale, shown across time and broken out by race and ethnicity. As of June 1, 2022, various land use applications, such as zoning text amendments impacting five or more community districts, the acquisitions or disposition of City land for non-residential use of at least 50,000 zoning square feet, increases of permitted residential zoning square footage of at least 50,000 square feet, and historic districts that impact four or more city blocks, are required to complete a Racial Equity Report (“RER”). The RER is intended to provide information and to serve as a starting point for conversation. The RER is not an environmental impact study and does not predict what will happen in the future; it outlines what an applicant is proposing.

The Committee posed several questions including how DCP intends to use EDDT, how it helps, how DCP will make it clear what triggers compliance with EDDT, and how DCP will ensure compliance and accountability. The Committee was informed that DCP is in the process of creating informational documents

and videos and continues working with the Racial Impact Study Coalition on the implementation of EDDT. The DCP reps stressed that EDDT is a disclosure tool, not an enforcement tool, and the intent is for RERs to promote dialogue about projects. They also stated that in recent meetings, the City Planning Commissioners inquired about and discussed the content of RERs for applicable projects.

Community resident Karla Fisk thanked DCP for its work on EDDT and stated that while it and the RER will not stop displacement, these tools consolidate in one place information that heretofore residents had to search multiple sites to locate.

The Committee stated that the impact of EDDT and the RER should be monitored and reported back to community boards, and also suggested further study of the legislation pursuant to which EDDT was created to help ensure it and the RER play a meaningful role in the planning process

4. **United Palace Illuminated Attraction Box Project.** Michael Fitelson, Executive Producer, United Palace, presented the Illuminated Attraction Box project (the “Project”) . The United Palace is a 92-year-old, landmarked theater that occupies the city block bounded by West 175th and 176th Streets, Broadway, and Wadsworth Avenue. The church, now known as the United Palace of Spiritual Arts, purchased the building in 1969. It is still used as a church, and in more recent years, also as a venue for movies and live events. Mr. Fitelson stated that there are 20 poster display boxes on the four street facades of the building. The Project includes converting six (6) of the boxes, four (4) on Broadway and two (2) at the corner of Broadway and West 175th Street, to illuminated displays. The Project will allow for timelier and more cost effective updating of information on the range of programs and events occurring at the United Palace.

The Committee was informed that the Project includes four digital displays and two static displays. The scope of work includes reframing and painting the display boxes, installing two 65-inch and two 75-inch Samsung digital monitors, plywood backing, plexiglass covers with locking mechanisms, weatherstripping, power and video cables, and custom-designed displays. Three of the four digital display boxes will be dedicated for use by the United Palace of Spiritual Arts and the United Palace of Cultural Arts, its non-profit affiliate; one will be dedicated for use by the Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance (“NoMAA”), which leases space and runs a gallery in the building. The two static displays will exhibit images and information, in English and Spanish, on the history of the United Palace. Project costs are estimated at \$12,000.

The Committee asked how the digital monitors will be secured, how the digital displays will accommodate the visually impaired, the level of illumination generated by the display boxes, if there are plans to convert any of the 16 other existing poster display boxes, and about signage for the entrance to NoMAA’s space. Mr. Fitelson stated that the plexiglass is shatterproof and will have robust locking systems, further exploration is required to determine the technology available to make the digital displays accessible for the visually impaired, coordination with NYC Department of Transportation is required to determine the level of illumination permitted, there are no plans to convert additional poster boxes since only the six included in the Project have electrical service. Regarding the signage for the entrance to NOMAA, Fitelson agreed that a better job can be done to identify the entrance to NoMAA’s space.

After further discussion, Committee member Simon moved to adopt a resolution in support of the Illuminated Attraction Box project. Committee member Bonner seconded the motion. The resolution was adopted with the following votes:

Committee Members 7-0-0
Members of the Public 2-0-0

5. **Discussion of CB12M Planning and Zoning Priorities with the office of Council Member Sean Abreu.** This discussion was postponed since Council Member Abreu had to leave the meeting early.
6. **FY2024 Capital and Expense Budget Priorities.** The Committee discussed the capital and expense items submitted for FY2023 and agreed to resubmit the items for FY2024 with minor revisions to further clarify for the capital expense that affordability must be defined by the average household income of current residents of Washington Heights and Inwood and to include the consideration of vacant privately-owned sites and buildings, and for the expense item to focus on development opportunities as well as preservation.

7. **Old Business:** None.

8. **New Business:**

- Inwood resident Dave Thom discussed the status of development or potential development activity on three sites with the Committee. He stated the car wash site next to the Eliza development / Inwood Library is for sale, the developer that holds the ground lease under the Amber Charter School plans to commence construction on the former Hurst Mansion next door, and that the Board of Standards and Appeals is scheduled to review the revised plan for the development project at the Holy Trinity Church site at Seaman Avenue and Cumming Street in mid-November.
- Committee member Ducat stated it has been a year since the American Academy of Arts and Letters presented its proposed project to Land Use and that an update on the status of the project is in order. Chair Benjamin stated he would contact the American Academy to inquire on the status of the project, modifications to its design, and when a presentation can be scheduled to update the Committee.
- Committee member Bonner asked that the Committee request a briefing on how the Civic Engagement Commission, which was created as an initiative of the 2018 Charter Revision Commission, is working with community residents and Community Boards. Chair Benjamin stated he would coordinate with CB12M's Chair and the Manhattan Borough President's office on this matter.

9. **Adjournment.** The meeting was adjourned at 9:19 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Wayne Benjamin