



Community Board 12 - Manhattan Washington Heights & Inwood

530 West 166th St. 6th Floor, New York, NY 10032

Phone: (212) 568-8500, Fax: (212) 740-8197

Shahabuddeen A. Ally, Esq., Chairperson
Ebenezer Smith, District Manager

Wednesday, July 11, 2018

Hon. Polly Trottenberg
Commissioner
Department of Transportation
55 Water Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10041

Dear Commissioner Trottenberg:

At the General Meeting, Tuesday, June 26, 2018 Community Board 12 Manhattan, passed the following resolution with a vote of 27 in favor, 16 opposed, abstention, supporting Columbia University's application to the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT)'s Plaza Program for the installation of a temporary plaza on Haven Avenue as proposed and described below and calling on Columbia University to monitor traffic accordance with DOT's recommendations to ensure optimum traffic operations in the area of the Plaza.

Whereas: The New York City Department of Transportation (DOT)'s NYC Plaza Program works with "organizations to create neighborhood plazas throughout the City to transform underused streets into vibrant, social public spaces... [and] is a key part of the City's effort to ensure that all New Yorkers live within a 10-minute walk of quality open space"; and

Whereas: "Eligible organization can propose new plaza sites for their neighborhoods through a competitive application process... [and] DOT prioritizes sites that are in neighborhoods that lack open space, and partners with community groups that commit to operate, maintain, and manage these spaces so they are vibrant pedestrian plazas"; with an emphasis on "proposals located in neighborhoods that qualify as low- or moderate-income"; and

Whereas: Advertising (other than light poles banners promoting "cultural exhibits and events or public or historical events which foster tourism and/or enhance the image of the City") are not permitted in the plazas, and commercial activity is not allowed other than sponsorships and commercial events, all of the revenue from which "must go back into the maintenance, management, and operation of the plaza" and may not accrue to the general financial benefit of the applicant organization; and

Whereas: These plazas are temporary installations that involve no permanent infrastructure changes, and consist of pavement markings, removable barriers, and other temporary measures that are easily removed should the plaza prove unpopular or unsuccessful or otherwise need to be removed; and

-
- Whereas:** Columbia University (“the University”) has applied to DOT to site such a plaza on Haven Avenue from W. 169th St. to W. 168th St. at Fort Washington Avenue, a space of one curving block, with upgrades that will include enhanced lighting, public seating, plantings, landscaping, open areas, and green space; and
- Whereas:** The Plaza, as conceived and designed, would be used a gathering place not only by the University staff and students but also by patients and visitors to the hospital and Medical Center as well as community residents from children to seniors, and as an open space for free-to-the-public cultural, artistic, recreational, and wellness programming; and
- Whereas:** The plan will include installation of bike racks for anybody’s use; and
- Whereas:** The University will be required to “enter into an agreement with DOT for the maintenance of the plaza so that the site is kept clean and in a state of good repair”, including but not limited to sweeping, trash and snow removal, and security services; and
- Whereas:** The proposal would require changing the flow of traffic of W. 169th St. between Fort Washington & Haven Avenues from a one-way westbound to a one-way eastbound, necessitating all traffic on Haven Avenue to exit at or prior to W. 169th St. as well as signal timing adjustments at the intersections of W. 171st & W. 168th Streets with Fort Washington Ave.; and
- Whereas:** The University will push deliveries to the perimeter of the campus, promote off-peak deliveries, extend central loading dock hours for the Black Building to 16 hours/day and for the Alan Rosenfeld Building loading dock hours to 8 hours/day, and has committed to not removing any of the parking spaces on W. 169th Street; and
- Whereas:** The University will remove the private staff/faculty parking at the curve of W. 168th St. & Haven Avenue in front of the School of Public Health and incorporate the resulting square footage into the plaza, constituting about 35,000 square feet or 60% of the total area of the proposed pedestrian plaza; and
- Whereas:** This loss of 32 faculty parking spaces will be replaced by parking in the University’s existing garages and lots, such that the displaced faculty will not be using street parking; and
- Whereas:** The University held three “One Day Plaza” events (6/14/16, 9/27/16, and 9/18/17) and two one-day events (6/29/16 & 6/26/17), with a variety of health, wellness, and cultural programming by the University and local community organizations, which were attended by more than 3,000 people, primarily the University’s staff and students as well as area residents; and
- Whereas:** Columbia University conducted surveys following each of these events, and received a total of 659 responses, 295 of which were from the immediate area and 66 from other ZIP codes of CB12M, and 579 of whom said they would like to see a plaza in that space; and
- Whereas:** There was a petition signed by more than 600 residents opposing this plaza in the strongest possible terms; and

- Whereas:** The University held a series of four public workshops in 2017 (on June 16th, July 17th, September 25th, & October 11th); and
- Whereas:** Joe Hintersteiner was a prolific painter and beloved teacher who, with his wife Marguerite, ran Arts Interaction and its gallery, posthumously renamed the Joseph Hintersteiner Gallery, in the Community Board 12, Manhattan (CB12M) office which was located on Haven Ave. at W. 168th St., and the bend of Haven Ave. at W. 168th St. was co-named in honor of Mr. Hintersteiner in 2005; and
- Whereas:** The University has committed to the creation of the Joe Hintersteiner Arts & Wellness Award within the Medical Center Neighborhood Fund, which will consist of up to three awards ranging from \$1,000-\$2,500 (\$5k total commitment) for each annual funding cycle in perpetuity, to fund grants to community organizations to provide free, open-to-the-public cultural, recreational, and/or wellness programming in the proposed plaza; and
- Whereas:** There is distrust of the University by some members of the community as well as the perception that the University is converting a public street to form a private campus and therefore for private gain; and
- Whereas:** There is concern that such a plaza will be used only half of the year (during the warmer months), and that utilization during the week will be primarily by the University and Medical Center constituency and not by the community at large; and
- Whereas:** There is a New York City park, J. Hood Wright Park, with a recreation center, playground and open space less than 10 minutes away from the proposed plaza; and
- Whereas:** There is a shortage of free public performance spaces in Community District 12; and
- Whereas:** Many local arts, performing arts, cultural, senior, athletic, and wellness organizations including the Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance, the Dance Project of Washington Heights, Nancercize, CHALK (Choosing Healthy & Active Lifestyles for Kids), Hike the Heights, and ARC Ft. Washington Senior Center, have written letters of support endorsing the proposed plaza and have agreed to collaborate with the University to provide a variety of free community programming in the proposed plaza; and
- Whereas:** There is a weekly farmers market from June-November adjacent to the proposed plaza that also should enhance programming in and use of such a plaza; and
- Whereas:** There has been a gradual loss over the years of public street parking in the vicinity of the Medical Center for uses by the University, the New York-Presbyterian Hospital, the New York State Psychiatric Institute such that an already scarce public resource has become even more precious, and the perceived loss of parking or the possible loss of even one space feels to many in the community like an assault; and
- Whereas:** CB12M passed a resolution on April 25, 2014 regarding 42 lost parking spaces due to the Hospital's construction of a new Emergency Department and the subsequent reconfiguration of traffic on and around W. 168th St., in which resolution CB12M requested a traffic study by DOT of W. 168th and W. 165th Streets which either were never done or the results of which were not shared with CB12M; and

-
- Whereas:** The proposed plaza would be installed at the same time as an unrelated three-and-one-half-year-long construction project south of the Medical Center, which will cause the temporary loss of scores of curbside parking spots for the duration of that project and may have a negative impact on street parking around the Medical Center; and
- Whereas:** There will be a loss of about 17-21 parking spaces (depending on the estimate) in the area of the proposed pedestrian plaza, with an addition of 18 spaces in the several block radius of the proposed plaza (+5 Alternate Side spaces on W. 169th St. @ Broadway, converted from metered space; +9 Alternate Side spaces on Riverside Drive @ W. 165th St., converted from physician parking; and +4 Alternate Side spaces on W. 165th St. @ Broadway, converted No Standing Anytime spaces) plus 13 possible metered spaces on St. Nicholas Ave. between W. 166th-168th Streets to be achieved through modified geometry, for no net loss, and a possible increase, of street parking; and
- Whereas:** The University has agreed to offer 100 evening/overnight parking (in after 6pm/out by 7am) slots to community residents at the rate of \$150/month (plus applicable NYS/ NYC sales taxes), and up to 17 additional spots to community residents at no charge for a transitional period of up to 18 months; and
- Whereas:** The University will hire a Plaza Manager whose job responsibilities will include, but not be limited to, coordinating programming, gathering usage and other data, working with the community regarding usage and any complaints, working with Project Renewal to resolve any inappropriate usage of the plaza by shelter clients, and acting as a liaison between the University and CB12M on any issues that might arise with respect to the plaza; and
- Whereas:** CB12's Traffic & Transportation (T&T) Committee heard multiple presentations from DOT and the University regarding this proposal, as well as substantial and vigorous input, both in favor and opposed, from local residents, students, faculty, community organizations, and elected officials at its 10/2/17, 11/6/17, 12/4/17 and 5/7/18 meetings; and
- Whereas:** CB12's T&T Committee voted to not approve the proposed Interim Plaza (0 in favor of the proposal; 5 against; 3 abstentions) irrespective of the results of any traffic study being conducted, the results of which were not then known, but declined to offer a resolution to the full Board for its consideration; and
- Whereas:** DOT reviewed and provided feedback on the University's application as well as its traffic studies dated 5/17/17 and 2/6/18 and issued approval for the proposal pending approval by CB12M, and recommending that following any implementation the University monitor traffic for two weeks and provide a full data-collection effort and analysis during a subsequent three-to-six-month period; now, therefore, be it
- Resolved:** Community Board 12, Manhattan supports Columbia University's application to the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT)'s Plaza Program for the installation of a temporary plaza on Haven Avenue as proposed and described above; and be it further
- Resolved:** Community Board 12, Manhattan calls on Columbia University to monitor traffic in accordance with DOT's recommendations to ensure optimum traffic operations in the area of the Plaza and requests that

the University promptly share the results of this study and any other traffic studies related to this project; and be it further

- Resolved:** Community Board 12, Manhattan will work with Columbia University to develop a fair and equitable lottery for community residents for up to 17 free temporary (up to 18-month) off-hour parking spaces; and be it further
- Resolved:** Community Board 12, Manhattan calls on Columbia University to establish an advisory group consisting of neighborhood residents, Community Board 12, Manhattan members, and Columbia University to monitor and report monthly on the use of the Plaza so that the Board can evaluate after six months of operation the success of the program, its use by area residents and its value to the community relative to any negative impacts of its operation, reserving the right to recommend the removal of the plaza and restoration of the current roadway and traffic patterns following such review; and be it further
- Resolved:** Community Board 12, Manhattan requests that DOT analyze traffic flow and patterns, with real time analysis, in the area of the Plaza following six months of operation and share this analysis with the Community Board's review; and be it further
- Resolved:** Community Board 12, Manhattan requests that GrowNYC's seasonal Tuesday Greenmarket on Ft. Washington Ave. at W. 168th St. be relocated to the pedestrian plaza; and be it further
- Resolved:** Community Board 12, Manhattan requests that the installation of this interim materials pedestrian plaza be delayed until the water main replacement project now being constructed by the NYC Department of Design and Construction in the vicinity of Haven Avenue is completed. *quoting from the DOT website and informational materials on its Plaza Program.

Sincerely,



Shahabuddeen A. Ally, Esq.
Chairperson

- cc: Edward F. Pincar Jr., Acting Manhattan Borough Commissioner Hon. Marisol Alcantara, State Senator
Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor Hon. Al Taylor, Assembly Member
Hon. Letitia James, Public Advocate Hon. Carmen De La Rosa
Hon. Scott M. Stringer, Comptroller Hon. Ydanis Rodriguez, Council Member
Hon. Adriano Espaillat, Congressman Hon. Mark Levine, Council Member

*Quoting from the DOT website and informational materials on its Plaza Program.