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## COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 2, MANHATTAN

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### Social Services Committee

The Social Services Committee of Community Board No. 2, Manhattan held its regular monthly meeting by Zoom on March 25, 2021, at 6:30pm.

Committee Members Present: Susanna Aaron, Chair; William Benesh, Keen Berger, John Paul Deverna, Wayne Kawadler, Adam Zeldin

Committee Members Tardy: Cathy Sullivan

Committee Members Absent With Notice: Wayne Kawadler

Other CB2 Members Present: Carter Booth, Chair; Betty Kubovy-Weiss; Coral Dawson, Mar Fitzgerald, Jeannine Kiely, Matthew Metzger, Donna Raftery, Susan Wittenberg,

CB2 Staff Present: Bob Gormley, District Manager

Public Members Present: Rachel Yarmolinsky

Public Members Absent With Notice: Jessica Aaron

Public Members Absent Without Notice: Chris Leonard

Representatives of Elected Officials Present: Charles Anderson (State Assemblywoman Glick); Luke Wolf (NYC Comptroller Stringer)

Members of the Public Present: Approximately 60 people

The public session concluded at 8:30pm. Business concluded at 9pm.

Agenda: Presentation by NYC Department of Social Services and the not-for-profit organization WestHab regarding plans to build an adult men's shelter at 10 Wooster Street (aka 349 Canal Street).

#### Panelists:

-Erin Drinkwater, Deputy Commissioner, NYC Department of Social Services

-James Coughlin, COO, WestHab

-Valerie C. Smith, Assistant VP, WestHab

-Daniel Liles, Directory of Security, WestHab

The NYC Department of Social Services, which includes the Department of Homeless Services, has entered into contract with WestHab, a not-for-profit social service provider based in Westchester, to construct and operate a shelter for 200 homeless male adults.

### REPORT

## BACKGROUND ON HOMELESSNESS AND SHELTER DEVELOPMENT

Over the course of fiscal 2020, over 122,926 different homeless men, women, and children slept in the shelter system in New York City, a 42% increase over ten years. In January of 2021, 20,738 single adults slept in city shelters. The number of homeless single adults has increased more extremely over this period, by 109%.<sup>1</sup>

Mayor Bill de Blasio's 2017 plan "Turning the Tide on Homeless" outlined several initiatives to address the homelessness crisis. Among these was a goal of opening 90 new shelters, aiming to develop five new high-quality shelters per year.<sup>2</sup>

New York maintains an "open-ended" Request for Proposals in order to increase its shelter capacity to the point where it has a "healthy" vacancy rate and no longer needs to rely on hotels for emergency shelter.<sup>3</sup> The city enters into contract with a social service provider, who may in turn enter into its own contract with a property owner or developer.

## SELECTING THIS SITE

This will be the second transitional shelter in Community District 2, along with a shelter for women that will open at 27 West 11<sup>th</sup> St in one to two years and be operated by Project Renewal. In addition, a Safe-Haven drop-in center operated by Center for Urban Community Services expects to open at 112-114 West 14<sup>th</sup> St this summer after some construction delays.

Per sections 203 and 204 of the New York City charter, the siting of municipal facilities must undergo a "Fair Share" analysis to ensure their fair distribution.<sup>4</sup> NYC DHS will issue a Fair Share evaluation prior to the shelter's opening. According to a distribution tally published in 2019<sup>5</sup>, the New York City Community District with the greatest number of shelter beds was CD Bronx 4, which housed 3,733 individuals, or 6.4% of the city's homeless population. CD Manhattan 2 housed 0, or 0.0%, which was the case for nine of the city's 59 Community Districts. At the opening of the 10 Wooster/ 349 Canal Street site – presuming that the Project Renewal facility on West 11<sup>th</sup> Street will have begun operations by that time – CD2 will house

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<sup>1</sup> Coalition for the Homeless, "Basic Facts About Homelessness." [https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NYHomelessnessFact-Sheet1-2021\\_citations.pdf](https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NYHomelessnessFact-Sheet1-2021_citations.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Office of the Mayor of New York City, "Turning the Tide on Homelessness," p.iv. 2017. <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/turning-the-tide-on-homelessness.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> NYC Department of Homeless Services. "In order to meet its legal and moral obligation to provide shelter to eligible New Yorkers in need, DHS maintains an open-ended Request for Proposal process through which non-profit social service providers submit proposals to augment capacity. Although DHS does not target specific areas to open shelters, the agency strives to keep families near their communities as much as possible. This is an open-ended request for proposals, therefore, there is no prescribed due date for submissions. All suitable proposals will be reviewed by the agency on an ongoing basis as received." <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dhs/about/contracts.page>

<sup>4</sup> New York City Council, "Doing our Fair Share, Getting our Fair Share." February 2017. <https://council.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2017-Fair-Share-Report.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Murphy, Jarrett, "Data Drop: Which NYC Neighborhoods Host the Most Shelter Beds?" City Limits, Sept. 10, 2019. <https://citylimits.org/2019/09/10/data-drop-which-nyc-neighborhoods-host-the-most-homeless-shelter-beds/>

290 of the city's 16,866 homeless adults in transitional shelters,<sup>6</sup> in addition to hosting a small number of beds for street homeless at the Safe Haven that will operate on West 14<sup>th</sup> Street.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

10 Wooster Street/349 Canal Street (Block 229, Lot 5) is a T-shaped building off the northeast corner of Wooster and Canal Streets. The lot has a footprint of 9,724 sf, built as 38,308 sf that is currently used as a 4-story parking garage. Zoning is M1-5B with maximum 5 FAR commercial, 6.5 FAR community facility.<sup>7</sup> The building is being developed by Liberty One, which will repurpose it and lease it to the shelter operator, WestHab. To date, Liberty One has developed six facilities operated by WestHab.

The renovation is currently in its design phase. The development process is expected to take about 18 months and will include approvals by the Landmarks Preservation Commission as well as all standard approvals as required by the city's development process. The building will be renovated, not demolished. Windows and other needed infrastructure will be added. The building will need to conform to requirements set by the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. The planned shelter is an as-of-right use and hence is not subject to the city's ULURP process. No applications for variances are foreseen at this time.

#### THE OPERATOR: WESTHAB

WestHab is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that currently operates ten shelter programs in New York City and three in Westchester, where the organization was founded in 1981. WestHab's activities center on housing and social services and include affordable housing construction and operation, employment programs, services for youth, etc.<sup>8</sup> WestHab currently operates three shelters of similar size to the one planned for 10 Wooster/349 Canal Street, two for men and one for women. In the last five years it has signed ten contracts with New York City to operate shelters in Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn. Its first project in Manhattan is on West 58<sup>th</sup> St but has been delayed by court injunction. During COVID-19 – from March to December of 2020 – WestHab moved 201 individuals into permanent housing.<sup>9</sup>

#### SELECTION OF RESIDENTS

New York States provides a legal right to shelter. Individuals and families who apply for shelter begin the process at an intake center. For adult men, this is at 400-430 East 30<sup>th</sup> Street. They are then placed in an assessment shelter for several weeks before they are matched to a program deemed appropriate for their needs. The average length of stay of single adults throughout the city's shelter system was 431 days in 2020, up from 401 days in 2018 (an

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<sup>6</sup> In 4<sup>th</sup> QTR of FY 2020. Of these, 12,314 men and 4,552 women. At that time, the average daily census of individuals in shelter also counted 36,548 members of families with children (adults and children included); and 5,177 individuals in adult families. DHS Data Dashboard for FY20. <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/dashboard/tables/FY20-DHS-Data-Dashboard-Data.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.oasisnyc.net/map.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.westhab.org/programs/>

<sup>9</sup> In 2019, this figure was 277 families and 205 individuals. [https://www.westhab.org/annual\\_report/](https://www.westhab.org/annual_report/)

increase that is partly due to the Covid-19 crisis).<sup>10</sup> As required by Local Law 114 and 115 of 2017, the NYC Department of Social Services reports annually on mental health services in the shelter system.<sup>11</sup>

This shelter will not house street homeless persons, ie, those who have not applied for “permanent” placement and have not undergone the assessment process. While there is no reliable measurement of street homeless in NYC, one estimate is 4,000 each night.<sup>12</sup> The city serves the street homeless population through outreach teams that aim to connect individuals to “low-threshold” programs and encourage them to enter the homeless shelter system.

Because of its location and proximity to facilities serving children (such as schools), by law this shelter will not house sex offenders with living restrictions.

## METHOD OF OPERATION

The number of people permitted in a shelter is prescribed by law according to “Callahan Decree” rules.<sup>13</sup> This shelter has a maximum capacity of housing 200 adult single men.

Residents will sleep in dorms housing eight to twenty people. As regulated by court orders as well as New York State statute and regulation, beds will be three feet apart, and individuals will have their own lockers. Communal bathrooms (stalls, urinals, showers) will be located on each floor. Under normal conditions – that is, pre- and post-Covid-19 – residents are expected to vacate their dorm rooms between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. but may stay indoors and on the premises during the day if they so choose. They are required to be in-house by 10pm curfew; clients are not permitted visitors.

Within the first twelve hours of arrival at the shelter, residents will be assigned to one of ten on-site case managers, overseen by a Director of Social Services, to identify factors that produced homelessness, create an independent living plan, and link residents to services to address barriers to housing. The facility will have a job developer to assist in obtaining and upgrading employment; a housing specialist to help obtain housing vouchers and seek an apartment; activities such as assorted life skills workshops, budgeting, organized games, computer trainings, mind and body activities and 24-hour security. Residents are tracked for three months after leaving the shelter to monitor success.

The profiles of the residents will vary widely and will include men who are employed or attending school. Some may have aged out of the foster care system, been formerly incarcerated, or have suffered domestic violence. Residents may have backgrounds of mental health or substance abuse. In cases where they require more assistance than this facility can provide, they will be transferred to a different shelter.

This project is in the design phase but WestHab anticipates that its amenities will be similar to those in its other shelters: a day room with a television; areas for recreational activities such as assorted life skills workshops, budgeting, organized games, computer trainings; a

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<sup>10</sup> NYC Department of Homeless Services, Preliminary Mayor’s Management Report.  
<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2021/dhs.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> NYC Department of Homeless Services, Local Law 115 of 2017 Report on Mental Health Services in Shelters.  
<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/Local-Law-115-of-2017-Report-CY2019.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> The Bowery Mission, <https://www.bowery.org/homelessness/>

<sup>13</sup> Callahan v. Carey, 1979. <https://www.escr-net.org/caselaw/2006/callahan-v-carey-no-79-42582-sup-ct-ny-county-cot-18-1979>

community resource center equipped with computers and staff to assist with job applications and housing search; counseling rooms; dining facilities; and offices for staff. The application filed with the NYC Department of Buildings is to “convert the existing 4 story parking garage into transient shelter facility with sleeping units on the 2nd thru 4th floors, and separate offices, cafe and mechanical rooms on the 1st floor.”<sup>14</sup> The site currently is not planning outdoor space for smoking. The only subcontracts will be for food service and building maintenance. The rest of the staff will be employed by WestHab.

## SECURITY

Residents are required to sign a Good Neighbor policy. The facility will distribute contact phone number to neighbors and will answer calls 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Once operational, the shelter will host a Community Advisory Board made up of local community members to monitor operation.

24-hour security will be provided by a staff of 40 in shifts of six to ten guards, with greatest concentration between 3pm-11pm daily. They will report to a staff of six security supervisors, who in turn report to a security manager and ultimately to the Director of Security for WestHab, Daniel Liles. Security guards will be licensed by the New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services and will be certified in fire safety, first aid, and CPR. Officers will be unarmed and will not have legal authority to make arrests. The security design is based on a community policing model. Guards will have training in conflict resolution and de-escalation, as well as use of Narcan in cases of opioid overdose.

Guards will patrol the immediate neighborhood and will forge relationships with local merchants and residents. There will be security cameras on the building and patrols along the street. Shelter residents will pass through a metal detector and there will be an X-ray machine on the premises. Weapons and contraband are forbidden. Residents will not be required to undergo drug testing.

## PUBLIC COMMENT

The public session was attended by over 60 people. We entertained questions and comments from 19 of them. Two of our panelists (Erin Drinkwater of DSS and Valerie C. Smith of WestHab) had prior comments that required them to leave our meeting at 7:30. In the interest of time - and recognizing that there will be subsequent meetings to allow opportunity for more comment - on this occasion we prioritized the questions and concerns of immediate neighbors. Some of them expressed support for this shelter; some expressed tentative support with reservations; the majority expressed concern and opposition. Recognizing that WestHab will engage in ongoing and frequent communication with CB2, the comments included here are intended to inform future community engagement and the project's design.

### Requests:

-THE ENTRANCE: a clear request, repeated by many, was that the entrance to the shelter be sited on Canal Street, which is brighter, wider, more commercial, than Wooster Street.

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<sup>14</sup> NYC Department of Buildings, Building Information Systems. <http://a810-bisweb.nyc.gov/bisweb/JobQueryByNumberServlet?requestid=2&passjobnumber=121209110&passdocnumber=01>

-SMOKING: another clear request was that the building house its own on-site smoking area in order to lower the number of shelter residents loitering on the street in order to smoke.

### Process

-What is the permitting process for this shelter? Does the community have the option to prevent it?

-“Turning the Tide” states as part of its mission that shelters are designed to place residents near anchor neighborhoods, but it is unclear what anchors future residents of this shelter will have to this neighborhood.

-Could this shelter house families rather than single men? Families would be more desirable.

-The price of real estate in this area is very high. What is the cost-benefit analysis that prompts DSS to site a shelter here?

### The building:

-There is interest to become more familiar with Liberty One, who will develop this site and has worked with WestHab before. What is its track record in terms of quality of construction, engagement with the surrounding community, adherence to city and state regulations?

-There is interest to learn more about Liberty One’s timeline, about the design of the facility, and about the approvals that will be part of the building process.

-Has the model of dorm rooms housing 8-20 people been successful for creating harmonious living conditions, even with individuals who might be struggling with issues of mental health and substance abuse? How can we learn how this model has performed in other WestHab sites?

-This garage has had decades of exposure to oil and exhaust and there is concern about environmental safety for the men who will live there.

-Is the size of the security staff guaranteed by contractual obligations, or is there the possibility that it might become less robust over time?

### Density

-200 men seems a high number for a location that corners a residential street with families.

-There is concern that 200 residents brings out-of-scale increase in density to a low-density street and a neighborhood – Soho – of few large buildings.

### Safety and Quality of Life

-The city has experienced an increase in crime, which increases neighbors’ concerns about living next door to a home for 200 single men, many of whom may have violent histories or untreated mental or drug issues.

-The success of this facility relies on a partnership with NYPD and NYPD has a poor record in dealing with emotionally disturbed persons.

-There are reports that the 1<sup>st</sup> Precinct at NYPD is called to the New York Rescue Mission several times a day, and hence there is a lack of confidence that the WestHab facility will prove safer.

-There is a sense that Canal Street has had poor police enforcement against sales of drugs, counterfeit goods, and vandalism. The concern is that the police will respond only in reaction to incidents of violent crime rather than in their prevention.

-There is deep concern over harm to quality of life, whether that be as extreme as crime or as common as loitering, smoking, noise.

-Loitering is a concern. There is little confidence in WestHab’s assurances that the men will be too busy throughout the day to loiter outside.

- There is a fear of clustering, given nearby siting of the New York Rescue Mission – at 90 Lafayette St. near Canal St – and a methadone clinic at 233 Lafayette St near Spring St.
- There is concern that the shelter, together with the methadone clinic and the mission, will attract drug dealers and others who “prey” on the residents.
- This area does not have a lot of green open space for this large population so there are questions about where residents will “hang out” during the day.
- There is concern that the shelter’s presence will hurt property values.
- What statistics do you have on recidivism rates for your clients that have criminal backgrounds?

### **NEXT STEPS**

WestHab and DSS have promised to return to CB2 to receive additional community input, answer further questions, and share updates about the ongoing design process. A date for our next meeting is under discussion but as of this writing has not been scheduled.