



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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BURT LAZARIN
Chair

JESSE R. BODINE
District Manager

May 14, 2018

Maria Torres-Springer
Commissioner
Dept. of Housing Preservation and Development
100 Gold Street
New York, NY 10007

**Re: 201 7th Avenue
Tenant Interim Lease
Affordable Neighborhood Cooperative Program
Proposed Redevelopment**

Dear Commissioner Torres-Springer,

On April 17, 2018 Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4)'s Housing Health and Human Services and Chelsea Land Use Committees received a follow-up presentation from the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) regarding the development of four buildings located at 201 7th Avenue, 203 7th Avenue, 205 7th Avenue, and 207 7th Avenue (the "Site").

By a vote of 43 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible to vote, MCB4 voted to make the requests outlined below:

- Relocation and all communication to be handled by Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE), the developer
- Design Changes: 3 bedroom units to be included in the building program and HPD and AAFE will work with MCB4 to obtain a mayoral override to maximize the project's residential floor area

Background

The Site is comprised of four five story tenement buildings located at 201 7th Avenue, 203 7th Avenue, 205 7th Avenue, and 207 7th Avenue. The buildings, which contain 14 residential units, are contiguous, and sit on the southeast corner of 7th Avenue and West 22nd Street. Built around 1870, they are pre-old law tenements.

Following years of landlord abandonment, the City foreclosed on the buildings on April 28, 1976. Over the next few decades, the buildings were entered into several different HPD programs, beginning with the Tenant Interim Lease (TIL) Program in 1978. The buildings left the TIL Program in the mid-1980s and were then directly managed by HPD until the late 1990s. At that point, they were briefly placed in the Neighborhood Redevelopment Program (NRP). In 1997 the buildings re-entered the TIL Program.

From 1997 until present, as the TIL Program changed, the buildings were moved to the Affordable Neighborhood Cooperative Program (ANCP) and a private developer was designated in 2013. HPD began relocating tenants in preparation for redevelopment of the Site.

ANCP later determined the developer was not performing and designated Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE) as the new developer in 2017. At the request of then Council Member—now Council Speaker—Corey Johnson, ANCP and the new developer met with representatives of MCB4 to discuss plans for redevelopment on August 7, 2017. At that meeting, ANCP and the development team informed MCB4 that the buildings could not be preserved and required demolition.

MCB4 was not pleased to hear that assessment, considering that it had advocated for the renovation of the buildings for over two decades. MCB4 requested that the sponsor undertake a full review to determine whether the structures could be preserved.

MCB4 did not hear from HPD and the development team again until November 2017, when the sponsor informed MCB4 that after completing a full review of the structural condition of the buildings, they could not be preserved. MCB4 asked HPD and the development team to meet with the Housing, Health, and Human Services Committee for a full presentation. That presentation finally took place on February 13, 2018. At the conclusion of that meeting MCB4 requested that the team return within the coming months to provide project updates¹.

Tenant Outreach and Communication

At HPD's presentation to the Housing, Health, and Human Services Committee on February 13, 2018, two tenants were present. Both tenants expressed dissatisfaction with HPD's lack of communication, clarity, and lack of developed plans. One tenant stated that they did not receive a notification from HPD about the public meeting and was instead informed by someone living in their building. Tenants noted they had been presented with multiple plans but the project had never started. Both tenants stated that they had not had regular meetings with HPD for years. In its letter to HPD on March 2018, MCB4 requested that HPD keep the buildings' tenants informed to ensure their ongoing participation in the development process.

¹ [MCB4 Letter to HPD dated March 13, 2018.](#)

In light of this request, MCB4 was very disappointed to see that no tenants were present at the meeting on April 17, 2018. MCB4 understands that tenants have received communications from HPD, the developer, and the Council Speaker's office. MCB4 requests that tenant outreach be managed by AAFE, not HPD, and that AAFE designate a specific staff member to act as tenant liaison. MCB4 believes this arrangement will help to better ensure clear and consistent communication, as well as trust, with the tenants.

Tenant Relocation

HPD has been managing the relocation of the three remaining tenants on the Site. For the same reasons cited above, MCB4 requests that tenant relocation now be managed by AAFE, not HPD, and that AAFE designate a specific staff member to act as tenant liaison for relocation.

Proposed Building Schematics

At the April 17, 2018 meeting the development team presented initial apartment layouts and massing diagrams. MCB4 felt that neither was detailed enough to comment on except for the following:

- 3 bedroom units should be included along with proposed studio, 1, and 2 bedrooms
- Proposed corner setback from the street to accomplish sidewalk widening is neither desirable nor needed
- Elevator core should be shifted south to maximize apartment square footage ²

Consistent Communication and Updates with Board

MCB4 thanks HPD and the developer for returning for the second time in two months to meet and provide updates. However, MCB4 would like to note that on April 13, 2018 it received a presentation from HPD that included massing diagrams and layouts that were dated July 21, 2017. Therefore, this development scheme, for demolition and new construction, was developed prior to our initial meeting in August 2017 *and not shared with MCB4 for nine months.*

That approach does not indicate transparency or cooperation.

Throughout its communication with HPD, MCB4 has requested frequent updates on the status of the project. MCB4 reiterates its request to be provided with updates and

² The architect responded that the building, as currently designed, is at its maximum zoning floor area. Committee members indicated support for a mayoral zoning override of bulk in order to increase the square footage of affordable housing.


information from the development team as the proposed plan progresses. Doing so would assist the project—which has already experienced extraordinary delays—in going through the public review process in a more speedy and efficient manner.

Conclusion

MCB4 still remains encouraged by the progress HPD and the developer have made on the proposed 201 7th Avenue development. However, in order to have a public and effective process, MCB4 exhorts HPD and the developer to continue discussing the project with MCB4. Most importantly, MCB4 wants to ensure that the tenants—both onsite and relocated—are engaged throughout this process.

MCB4 looks forward to working with HPD and AAFE, in redeveloping this prominent location on the corner of West 22nd Street and 7th Avenue as permanent affordable housing.

Sincerely,




Burt Lazarin
MCB4 Chair


Signed [5/14/2018]
Barbara Davis, Co-Chair
Housing, Health &
Human Services Committee



Joe Restuccia, Co-Chair
Housing, Health &
Human Services Committee



Betty Mackintosh, Co-Chair
Chelsea Land Use Committee



Lee Compton, Co-Chair
Chelsea Land Use Committee

cc: Hon. Corey Johnson, Speaker, City Council
Hon. Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Hon. Brad Hoylman, New York State Senator
Hon. Richard Gottfried, New York State Assembly
Tenants of 201-207 7th Avenue (both on site and relocated)
Save Chelsea
T. Yu, Asians Americans for Equality
A. Alexopoulos, Asians Americans for Equality
C. Ratzleff, ANCP Program, HPD