



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

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**LOWELL D. KERN**  
Chair

**JESSE R. BODINE**  
District Manager

May 5th, 2020

James Patchett, President & CEO  
NYC Economic Development Corporation  
One Liberty St, New York, NY 10006

Marisa Lago, Chair  
NYC Department of City Planning  
120 Broadway  
New York, NY 10271

Signe Nielsen, President  
Justin Garrett Moore, Executive Director  
Public Design Commission of the City of New York  
City Hall, Third Floor  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: 495 Eleventh Avenue, Slaughterhouse Site**

Dear Mr. Patchett, Ms., Lago, Mr. Moore, and Ms. Nielsen,

On March 11th, 2020, at the MCD4 Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land (CHKLU) committee meeting, Radson Development (the "Developer") presented an updated design concept for the Slaughterhouse site at 495 Eleventh Avenue between 39<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> Streets ("Site"). The two-tower design concept, developed in consultation with MCB4 leadership, the CHKLU committee, and approved by MCB4, envisions two towers, one for a hotel, the second for permanently affordable residential housing. MCB4 reluctantly agreed to a hotel on the site in order to achieve affordable housing without public subsidy. The two-tower proposal ensures a separation of uses, with each tower having separate entries.

At the meeting, the Developer informed the CHKLU committee that the design had been rejected by the Public Design Commission (PDC) in consultation with the Department of City Planning (DCP). MCB4 is mystified and finds it unbelievable that PDC, DCP, and the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) did not coordinate with MCB4 in this long, drawn out process subject to multiple discussions since 2014. Therefore, the CHKLU committee and the Board voted unanimously to oppose the PDC's rejection. MCB4 requests a meeting with the PDC, DCP, and EDC to discuss moving forward with this long-awaited affordable housing project.

<sup>1</sup> Due to the COVID19 crisis the letter was approved by the Executive Committee on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, and subject the ratification at the May 6<sup>th</sup> Full Board.

## **Background**

The Slaughterhouse Site was home to the New York Butchers' Dressed Meat Company, formed by local butchers and located in a bustling industrial area with its close proximity to water transport and freight rail yards. The Slaughterhouse was built in two sections in 1903 and 1917 to form a block long building that remained operational until the late 1950s. The City took title 1978 because of nonpayment of real estate taxes.

During the late 1980s, MCB4 urged the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) to designate the property as a landmark. LPC did not review the request and the building deteriorated. EDC looking to redevelop the site as a Visual Merchandising Facility (VMF), found it structurally unsound and called for its demolition over the objections of MCB4. The "structurally unsound" building took 18 months to demolish. Ultimately, EDC's VMF plan never came to fruition. From the time of demolition until the late 1990s, there was no plan put forth. Since that time, the vacant lot has been used as temporary unimproved surface parking for New York City Police Department (NYPD).

## **MCB4 Efforts to Develop the Site**

MCB4 brought the Site to the attention of the City as part of Hudson Yards and the West Chelsea Rezoning. It was turned down by the City as an affordable housing site due to the Site's complexity. The Site is small in size (about 25,000 SF) and sits adjacent to the Lincoln Tunnel vent building, with Lincoln Tunnel tubes running under a portion of it. MCB4 also brought the Site to the City in the Western Rail Yard rezoning in 2009, and again in the 2014 MCB4 Affordable Housing Plan.

Finally, MCB4 proposed the Site's development as an alternative solution to the unfulfilled affordable housing commitments in the Hudson Yards and Western Rail Yards Points of Agreements (POAs). The Site would replace the development of 150 affordable housing units on Site M (Tenth Avenue between 40th and 41st Streets), and 75 units on West 20th Street now programmed as a park in Chelsea. The City agreed to the proposition on the condition, at the request of Deputy Mayor, Alicia Glen, that there would be no public subsidy on the Site, .

To execute that agreement, EDC worked with MCB4 to release an Request For Proposal (RFP) for development of the Site in August 2015 that reflected the community's needs and concerns.<sup>2</sup> MCB4 advocated for 100% affordable housing on the site, a range of incomes, family sizes units, and commercial space within a height limit.<sup>3</sup> EDC designated Radson Development as RFP winners in May 2017.

After this considerable delay even after designation, EDC and Radson Development presented a plan for the proposed project to CHKLU committee. That proposal included 234 affordable apartments, 217,000 square feet of office space; 536 dormitory beds; and, over 10,000 square feet for a grocery store. After feedback from MCB4, the Developer moved forward in the ULURP process and presented again to CHKLU in April 2018 as required by the Environment Impact Statement (EIS). MCB4 was surprised at the proposed plan, which included a food court, office space, and more dormitory beds, and bore limited resemblance to MCB4s community vision described in the RFP with far less affordable housing.

<sup>2</sup> <https://edc.nyc/press-release/nycedc-and-hpd-announce-housing-new-york-request-proposals-former-slaughterhouse-site>

<sup>3</sup> [Letter to NYCEDC and HPD May 20th, 2015](#)

Between April 2018 and early 2020, MCB4, the Developer, and elected officials met 10 additional times to discuss the project to achieve consensus, with concessions on all sides. MCB4 agreed to increase the height limit to 450 feet and again to 500 feet. Radson Development changed the program from dormitories to a hotel use and altered the design of the proposed plan to connect to the neighborhood's industrial past after an MCB4 rejection. In consultation with MCB4 and EDC, after this series of meetings, the Developer responded and produced the current design, all the while informing and in conjunction with EDC.

The latest iteration on the program and the design (“Proposed Development”) on the Site is an end product of six years, including 45 meetings, briefings, and conference calls with MCB4, EDC, the Speaker’s Office, and City Council Land Use on this project, along with numerous approved MCB4 letters.<sup>4</sup>

In October 2019, the Board overwhelmingly approved the updated and revised Proposed Development with minor modifications.<sup>5</sup> The idea that the City agencies have not coordinated with one another and now are advocating to start from scratch, ignores the extensive and thoughtful community and public input that ensures the success of this proposed affordable housing development in MCD4.

### **Current Proposed Development**

The current Proposed Development encompasses one commercial tower with a hotel use and one residential tower that is 100% permanently affordable. The mixed-use proposal also includes a community facility, a restaurant, a supermarket (14,000 SF), and a coworking space (19,823 SF), along with NYPD parking (25,483 SF).

The affordable housing program would not include HPD/HDC subsidy while providing:

- 350 total affordable units serving a diverse range of household incomes with a focus on family-sized units:
  - 275 permanently affordable with weighted average of 80% AMI, at a range income bands
  - 75 supportive housing units for formerly homeless and special needs populations at 30% AMI with on-site supportive housing services
- Residential amenities (rooftop terrace, gym, storage, bicycle storage) available to all tenants

MCB4 voted to support the Proposed Development in October 2019, stating the proposed two-tower concept “offers the opportunity to meet community needs and comes closer to the project envisioned by this Board a decade ago.”<sup>6</sup> The Board also noted in 2019 that the Project’s proposed design would:

- Contribute to the mixed-use character of the built environment, adding vibrancy to this newly developing neighborhood
- Use materials which relate to the industrial past of the sit

<sup>4</sup> Appendix A.

<sup>5</sup> [Letter to NYCEDC October 22, 2019](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Letter to NYCEDC October 22, 2019](#)

- Integrate pedestrian and vehicle scale of Eleventh Avenue *with a three-story base building covering entire site supporting two towers* to create a more appealing pedestrian and streetscape experience

After collaboration with EDC and presentations at numerous public meetings, the Developer went to PDC in February 2020 for Design Review and Comment. Given the carefully crafted and community supported development that EDC had shepherded through a 6-year development process, the Developer was surprised at PDC's rejection and DCP's agreement with the concerns. Despite its role as the project lead, EDC did not communicate with neither the developer, nor with the community on any of these design concerns raised by PDC prior to the PDC hearing. Further the Developer was surprised that DCP had shared its concerns and communicated them to EDC prior to the hearing. MCB4 finds it unbelievable that throughout this entire, 6-year, thoughtful process, at this penultimate step, EDC, PDC, or DCP have not communicated clearly and accurately to the developer nor the community.

### **Maintain Consensus in the Context of Constraints**

The stakeholders in this Proposed Development have gone to great lengths to come up with a viable development proposal that meets the goals of MCB4 and of the City of New York to build more affordable housing. The viability of the development design and program is particularly limited due to a number of design constraints. These include:

- The lack of public subsidy for affordable housing as part of the Deputy Mayor agreement
- The required inclusion of NYPD parking on the Site
- The small size of the Site (125 X 150 SF)
- The proximity to the Lincoln Tunnel vent building
- Lincoln Tunnel tubes underneath a portion of the Site

The two-tower concept provides significant community benefits while working within these design constraints. Firstly, the residential portion of the project which include 350 units of permanently affordable housing is subsidized by the neighboring commercial tower and requires no public subsidy.

Second, the two-tower concept has been publicly discussed and vetted on multiple occasions by MCB4, elected officials and members of the community. This proposal has gone through multiple MCB4 chairs during this multi-year process that has included concession from all parties. The Developer requested that MCB4 modify its position on the community agreements on height limits. MCB4 also modified its stance on the inclusion of a hotel on the site when that became the necessity in order to cross subsidy affordable housing to work with minimal City subsidy. After a 6-year working relationship between stakeholders, with parties on all sides making concessions, consensus on design and program for the Site has finally been reached.

Third, this two-tower concept addresses these constraints while echoing the stone and brick architecture to the north and the east. The two tower design concept fits in the long-term industrial fabric of the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood. Any design should not reflect a symbol of Hudson Yards but instead should be a reflection of Hell's Kitchen and surmount multiple obstacles to create affordable housing.

In a press release from EDC in 2015, HPD Commissioner Vicki Been said “Housing New York envisions the type of community engagement and interagency cooperation that results in the creative reuse of City-owned sites.”<sup>7</sup> The Proposed Development is a fulfillment of that goal.

## Conclusion

PDC and DCP seemed to have approached the Proposed Development outside of context. Despite six years of obstacles, iterations and compromises, MCB4, elected officials, and community members achieved consensus for a concept that would provide affordable housing without public subsidy, a parking solution for NYPD, and a grocery store. The Public Design Commission’s rejection of the entire design concept wipes this progress away and requires that the community, MCB4, and the Developer start from the beginning. That action makes no common sense. The community was also insulted that this building should be a reflection of Hudson Yards as opposed to Hell’s Kitchen Community.

The Board therefore rejects the position of the PDC and DCP and requests a sit-down meeting with all agencies, the developer, the community, and MCB4 to get to common and sensible solution.



Lowell Kern  
Chair



Jean-Daniel Noland  
Chair

Manhattan Community Board 4 Clinton/Hell’s Kitchen Land Use Committee

cc: Hon. Corey Johnson, New York City Council Speaker  
Hon. Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President  
Hon. Jerrold Nadler, U.S Congressman  
Hon. Brad Hoylman, New York State Senate  
Hon. Richard Gottfried, New York State Assembly  
Hon. Linda B. Rosenthal, New York State Assembly  
Radson Development

<sup>7</sup> <https://edc.nyc/press-release/nycedc-and-hpd-announce-housing-new-york-request-proposals-former-slaughterhouse-site>

## **Appendix A. Previous MCB4 Letters on Slaughterhouse Project**

May 20, 2015

<https://www1.nyc.gov/html/mancb4/downloads/pdf/2015%20PDFs/May%202015/04%20CHKLU%20letter%20to%20EDC%20and%20HPD%20re%20Slaughterhouse%20RFP.pdf>

August 5, 2015

<https://www1.nyc.gov/html/mancb4/downloads/pdf/2015%20PDFs/july/37%20CHKLU%20letter%20to%20EDC%20re%20Slaughterhouse%20and%20RPF%20Process.docx.pdf>

October 15, 2015

[https://www1.nyc.gov/html/mancb4/downloads/pdf/2015%20PDFs/October\\_2015/17\\_CHKLU\\_letter\\_to\\_EDC\\_re\\_493\\_11th\\_Ave-\\_Slaughterhouse\\_RFP\\_Follow\\_up.pdf](https://www1.nyc.gov/html/mancb4/downloads/pdf/2015%20PDFs/October_2015/17_CHKLU_letter_to_EDC_re_493_11th_Ave-_Slaughterhouse_RFP_Follow_up.pdf)

June 7, 2017

[https://www1.nyc.gov/html/mancb4/downloads/pdf/15\\_chklu\\_letter\\_to\\_edc\\_re\\_slaughterhouse\\_495\\_11th\\_ave\\_development.pdf](https://www1.nyc.gov/html/mancb4/downloads/pdf/15_chklu_letter_to_edc_re_slaughterhouse_495_11th_ave_development.pdf)

May 16, 2018

<https://www1.nyc.gov/html/mancb4/downloads/pdf/may-2018/20-Letter-to-Mayor-EDC-re-Slaughterhouse-Site.pdf>

October 22, 2019

<https://www1.nyc.gov/html/mancb4/downloads/pdf/october-2019/02-letter-to-edc-radson-dev-re-slaughterhouse-495-11th-ave.pdf>