



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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LOWELL D. KERN
Chair

JESSE R. BODINE
District Manager

March 10, 2020

Andrew Cantor
Senior Vice President
Related Companies (“Related”)
60 Columbus Circle
New York, NY 10023

Angela Cavaluzzi
President
Hudson Yards Development Corporation (“HYDC”)
110 William Street, Room 400
New York, NY 10038

Re: Suicide at the Vessel

Dear Vice President Cantor and President Cavaluzzi,

At the Full Board meeting of Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) on February 5th, anguish was expressed, and concern raised about the suicide of a young man at the Vessel on Saturday, February 1st.

Because the Vessel’s chest-high barrier is all that separates the platform from the edge, the likelihood of a similar, terribly sad loss of life cannot be ignored. Inevitably, the Board and the community are asking what steps Related is taking to reduce that likelihood.

At the Full Board’s public session, Carla Fine, the author of “No Time To Say Goodbye: Surviving the Suicide of A Loved One,” pointed out that a considerable proportion of suicide attempts is the result of sudden inclinations, or “impulsivity.” There is evidence that barriers on high structures such as bridges can significantly reduce these sudden inclinations.

The design of the Vessel as a high structure where “impulsivity” suicide was a potential, was noted in a 2016 review of the Vessel, by Audrey Wachs, the former associate editor of the *Architect’s Newspaper*. She criticized the Vessel’s designer for “not learn[ing]” from past suicides from city bridges and tall buildings. In the reviews she advised: “As one climbs up

Vessel, the railings stay just above waist height all the way up to the structure's top, but when you build high, folks will jump.”

(Learning about the suicide, Wachs said she “felt terrible for this person and his family and friends. This is not a critique you would like to be proven right.”)

We are not unmindful that Related also is saddened and concerned about this sorrowful loss of life. Apparently, however, the morning after the young man's death, according to the New York Times, “...dozens of visitors waited in line to enter the sculpture. No areas appeared to be restricted, and a security guard was not aware of any extra security measures but said guards were trained to look out for possible suicides.”

Given the fact that sometimes no one, not even parents or close friends, can know the private torment a suicidal person is suffering, we all might feel less than reassured by the security guards' training.

When someone jumps to his death from a high place it is by its nature a public act. It resonates deeply in the community's consciousness. A compassionate community, of which Related is a valued member, must consider all efforts to protect as best we can vulnerable citizens and visitors.

So, we are heartened to learn that Related will enhance suicide prevention training of its security staff and has reached out to suicide-prevention experts. Obviously, further steps must be considered. These experts will surely point out that while it is true that ultimately nothing can stop a person determined to find a way to harm themselves, it is also true that installing adequate physical barriers on high places can prevent or substantially reduce suicides, especially impulsive ones. As was pointed out at the March 4th MCB4 Full Board Meeting¹, it took a tragically long time for NYU to act to prevent suicides from the balconies of the Bobst Library. (After the second death of a student, NYU stationed security guards on the balconies. It did not prevent a third suicide.)

The Board appreciates Related's willingness to consider and take steps to prevent another terrible loss of life on the Vessel. We look forward to receiving updates on these efforts.

Sincerely,



Lowell Kern
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4

¹ This letter was voted on at the March 4th Full Board meeting, with 33 in favor, 0 against, 4 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible to vote.



Jean Daniel Noland
Chair
Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use Committee

Cc: Hon. Jerrold Nadler, U.S. Congressman
Hon. Brad Hoylman, U.S. Senate
Hon. Richard Gottfried, NYS Assembly
Hon. Corey Johnson, Speaker, New York City Council
Hon. Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Robert Benfatto, President, Hudson Yards Hell's Kitchen Alliance
Thomas Heatherwick, Architect, The Vessel