



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

330 West 42nd Street, 26th floor New York, NY 10036
tel: 212-736-4536 fax: 212-947-9512
www.nyc.gov/mcb4

Lowell Kern
Chair

Jesse Bodine
District Manager

June 11, 2020

Diane Louard-Michel
Executive Director
Lantern Community Services
494 8th Avenue, 20th Floor
New York, NY 10001

Re: 330-332 West 51st Street, Stardom Hall - Operations Issues

Lantern Community Services, a non-profit organization, provides social services to needy and homeless New Yorkers. Their SRO Preservation development, 330-332 West 51st, Stardom Hall, has been supported by MCB4 in the past but has presented ongoing operations issues affecting both the buildings' tenants and the surrounding blocks. Lantern's management and social service program choices are more reflective of the social service facility model rather than permanent supportive housing with services. Although the development was presented and approved as an SRO Preservation, a portion of the resident population served is much more social service needy, with mental health needs better suited to a supervised residence with medication management. The community's experience demonstrates that tenants with severe chronic mental health or substance abuse issues cannot properly be supported at the Stardom Hall site.

Because of this model and choice of social service needy population, a minority of tenants with dangerous, threatening and violent behavior have disrupted the lives of the residents of West 51st Street between 8th and 9th Avenues. Continuing to today, troublesome activities include uncontrolled screaming, violent conduct, hanging out in front of the building and on the block, menacing passersby and illegal drug activity. This type of conduct has been, and continues to be, observed on a regular basis by community residents and Community Board members. This continued situation has transformed a peaceful residential block into a chaotic and unsettling place.

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) recognizes that the social service issues are complicated; nonetheless Lantern must respond specifically to the operational concerns raised by tenants, the block association and neighbors. MCB4 insists Lantern create a written detailed plan to correct these aggravated problems. Lantern must be prepared to present this plan at the next Community Advisory Committee meeting on July 7, 2020.

Background

Lantern Community Services is a non-profit organization providing social services to needy and homeless New Yorkers in buildings that are developed and owned by entities controlled by its parent not-for-profit, the Lantern Organization.

In 2011, Lantern acquired two SRO buildings, 330-332 West 51st Street, as part of an SRO Preservation commitment made in the December 2009 Western Rail Yards Points of Agreement (WRY POA) between the Mayor and the City Council. The 132 unit building was renovated, with a reduction to 108 units. From 2011, in the interim management, the renovation planning and during construction MCB4 has had extensive involvement with both Lantern and the building's long-term tenants. The Lantern Community Advisory Committee (Lantern CAC) met regularly, negotiated changes to the proposed designs, secured the commitment for ADA bathrooms and managed and responded to tenant issues during construction. The building has been operating since 2018 and now has community tenants occupying 60% and formerly homeless tenants in 40% of the units. The CAB ceased to meet in 2017.

Reconstitution of the Lantern CAC

However, in the past year, the ongoing concerns with Lantern's Stardom Hall operations, necessitated reconstitution of the Lantern CAB. Since the initial development, Lantern has had three Executive Directors. MCB4 thanks the current Executive Director, Diane Louard-Michel, for reviving the CAC and meeting with the 50/51st Street Block Association, the Councilmember's office and MCB4 to address these ongoing unresolved operational issues. MCB4 appreciates Lantern reconstituting the Lantern CAB, which met on December 16, 2019, and also met January, March, April and May of 2020.

MCB4 Meetings

Lantern Presentations

Ms. Louard-Michel presented to the Housing, Health and Human Services Committee of Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) on January 22, 2020 to provide an overview of the organization, and the services it offered. This overview was a necessary follow up presentation to Lantern coming to HHHS meeting October 2019 where Lantern's request to be added to MCB4 city budget request for weekend exterior security was denied, the Committee believing deeper solutions were needed. However, MCB4 notes that generalities of Lantern's mission are not the matter at hand, its poor operation and management of dealing with difficult tenants is the main issue.

Community Response

Over both the October 2019 and January 2020 meetings, building tenants and community residents raised the following concerns:

- Serious concerns about the few disruptive tenants who have created ongoing quality of life and safety problems for the building and the block.
- The manner in which overnight guests are permitted, the building being Rent Stabilized apartments
- The atmosphere created for the tenants and residents of the block with guards in uniform as opposed to shirts or blazers
- Improving ADA compliance in all bathrooms

MCB4 at its regularly scheduled Full Board meeting on June 3, 2020, voted by a vote of 46 in favor, 1 opposed, 2 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible to vote, to support HHHS recommendations

Community Room & Social Service Program Space

Lantern also noted that *the Community room and social service offices are only now being completed due to filing and Certificate of Occupancy issues*. Lantern has been using SRO rooms for social service offices and has provided no program space or programs for tenants. Committee members reminded Lantern that these elements were part of the original plan approved by MCB4 in 2013. A building with social service needy tenants cannot function without space for provision of such services.

Disruptive Tenants

In regards to identified disruptive tenants, Lantern is currently pursuing a variety of options including alternative placement and legal action in Housing Court. To proceed, Lantern has sought authorization from the NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA). MCB4 finds this requirement disturbing.

This location was presented as independent supportive housing, it now has social service contracts from HRA to support such deeply needy tenants, requiring authorization for such basic landlord tenant matters. *Those choices must be reconsidered*. This is demonstrated by the community's experience with disruptive tenants that those with severe chronic mental health or substance abuse issues cannot properly be supported at the Stardom Hall site.

In independent supportive housing, DHS, DHMH or HRA make referrals to the not-for-profit owner, which screen tenants for suitability with the level of social services provided. Lantern must do a more thorough assessment and screening of prospective tenants. If tenants become disruptive after being housed, Lantern must quickly address the issues and pursue legal action in Housing Court when needed.

Lack of Action by Lantern

Lantern's long delay in addressing the disruptive tenants has had serious consequences. Its neighbors have seen their quality of life and their peaceful enjoyment of their homes be dramatically affected. Our neighborhood has welcomed well run social services and supportive housing because they become part of block and neighborhood fabric. They are not institutions but community partners. The neighbors of West 51st Street do not view Lantern as a community partner. In fact the poor operation of Stardom Hall has forced the community to reconsider its long-term position to support such endeavors. That change in perception and support is a direct consequence to lack of resolution of these serious issues.

Conclusion

The 300 block of West 51st Street between 8th and 9th Avenues, is a community block, dense with residential buildings, townhouses with ground floor restaurants, a women's shelter, and a small hotel.

MCB4 has welcomed community facilities and social services in our District, but it is imperative that tenants be placed in appropriately staffed housing with services and programs that match their needs.

Lantern must respond specifically to all the operational issues raised by tenants, the block association and neighbors. Lantern needs to develop a plan to address and correct these concerns.

MCB4 at its regularly scheduled Full Board meeting on June 3, 2020, voted by a vote of 46 in favor, 1 opposed, 2 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible to vote, to support HHHS recommendations

While we appreciate the ongoing dialogue, please be prepared with specific responses by the Lantern CaC meeting on July 7th, 2020 to address these community concerns.

Sincerely,



Lowell Kern
Chair



Joe Restuccia
Co-Chair Housing, Health & Human
Services

[signed 6/11/2020]

Maria Ortiz
Co-Chair Housing, Health & Human
Services

CC:

Commissioner Steven Banks, \New York City Human Resources Administration/Department of Social Services (HRA)

Hon. Corey Johnson, City Council

Hon. Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President

Steve Belida, HK 49-53 Block Alliance

350 W 51st Street Tenant Association

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