



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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LOWELL D. KERN
Chair

JESSE R. BODINE
District Manager

February 12, 2021

Casals Gonzalo
Commissioner
Department of Cultural Affairs
31 Chambers St., 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10007

Jonnel Doris
Commissioner
NYC Small Business Services
One Liberty Plaza, 11th Floor
New York, NY 10006

Robert Benfatto
President
NYC Business Improvement District Association
PO Box 956
Village Station
New York, NY 10014

Re: Support of ChaShaMa Arts Programing and Vacant Properties Programing

Dear Commissioner, Gonzalo, Commissioner Doris, and Mr. Benfatto,

The Arts, Culture, Education & Street Life Committee (ACES) of Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) at it's January 11th 2021 committee meeting heard a presentation from ChaShaMa arts organization which currently has an exhibit in the district, located at 320 West 23rd Street. On the unanimous recommendation of its ACES Committee, MCB4, at its regularly scheduled meeting on February 3, 2021, voted, by a vote of 41 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible to vote, to recommend support ChaShaMa's program to utilize vacant commercial retail space for arts programing.

Background

ChaShaMa has a history of supporting artists by transforming vacant retail locations into spaces that enable artists to create and present their work. In addition, free art classes are provided with a focus on our under-served communities. Founded in 1995, the organization recognized that a lack of affordable space was the biggest threat to sustaining a diverse cultural environment in New York City. They began to work toward securing studio and presentation space for struggling artists by partnering with property owners to provide the vacant space. Their efforts have now expanded to the 5 boroughs and beyond, presenting over 700 shows in midtown Manhattan. They have awarded \$9 Million worth of real estate to artists, subsidized 200 artist workspaces, provided over 200 free art classes, and given 170 artists free space to present. This is all done within their programming, which includes:

Space to create:

- Providing affordable workspace for visual artists. Locations include the five boroughs, upstate New York and Matawan, and New Jersey.

Space to present:

- Providing free presentation space for visual artists, performers, and curators. The locations are throughout the city.

Space to connect:

- Focusing on disenfranchised communities throughout the five boroughs to collaborate with local organizations to create free arts programming.

ChaNorth:

- The organization operates a residency program in Pine Plains, New York.

Current Economic Crisis

Many commercial properties continue to sit empty and underutilized due to the economic stress of the COVID-19 pandemic. ChaShaMa activated spaces are using a creative marketing strategy for attracting long-term tenants. This combination of artistry and promotion of spaces for lease provides a positive outcome for all parties involved and the surrounding neighborhood. Property owners also benefit through positive public engagement, enhanced sidewalk visibility, and acknowledgment in press and marketing materials.

Conclusion

ChaShaMa reinforces cultural organizations and economic growth by continuing to provide affordable workspace for visual artists in unused real estate spaces. For these reasons, MCB4 expresses support for ChaShaMa, and other organizations that strongly encourages more local property owners in our district to take advantage of its services.

MCB4 believes that city agencies such as the Department of Cultural Affairs and Small Business Services should engage and support ChaShaMa as well.
Sincerely,

Sincerely,



Lowell D. Kern
Chair
Community Board 4



Allen Oster
Co-Chair
ACES Committee



Kit Tollerson
Co-Chair
ACES Committee

CC: Hon. Corey Johnson, Speaker, City Council
Hon. Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President