

CITY OF NEW YORK
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District Manager

March 11, 2022

Noreen Doyle
President
Hudson River Park Trust
Pier 40, 353 West Street, Room 201
New York, NY 10014

Re: Significant Action Process for Chelsea Piers

Dear President Doyle,

At its March 2nd Full Board meeting by a vote of 39 in favor, 0 against, 0 abstentions and 1 present but not eligible, MCB4 voted to recommend that the lease not be executed as presented. The Board requests the Trust and Chelsea Piers address the Board's significant concerns in any final agreement they reach. At the same time, the Board express our appreciation for all the value Chelsea Piers adds to the quality of life in our community.

Key Concerns

- Very long duration of the lease
- Dangerous conditions caused by traffic lanes and lack of pedestrian space on the eastern side of the Headhouse
- Lack of accommodation for green transportation and use of parking
- Chelsea Piers offerings are unaffordable to a large majority of our residents.

Such a long contract duration calls for a contractual commitment by Chelsea Piers to be more equitable, insure safety in public space and promote a green environment.

The Waterfront Parks and Environment Committee at its February 10th meeting benefitted from a two-hour discussion with the Hudson River Park Trust and Chelsea Piers informing MCB4 about the current state of their negotiations regarding the renewal of their lease. Noreen Doyle represented the Trust and David Tewksbury represented the Piers. The proposed lease was

posted on the HRPT website ([Chelsea Piers — Hudson River Park](#)) on Friday, February 11 marking the beginning of a 60 day public comment period for this “significant action.”

While the discussion was at moments heated, MCB4, at the outset of this letter, wants to affirm its respect for and appreciation of the work Chelsea Piers does and the services it provides to our community. The Piers employs approximately 2,000 people and in addition to its sports and recreational activities there are TV studios, a marina, a Museum and Exhibitions, some retail and events’ spaces. The incomes from these non-sports activities enable the Piers to financially support their athletic activities. These activities continue under the new lease.

Some History

Chelsea Piers and the Hudson River Park Trust have in place a 1994 lease with 21 more years to go. The new lease will be for a 34-year term with a ten-year renewal option bringing the total possible lease term to 44 years. A review for expansion of catering, restaurants and retail is required. Nightclubs and other noise generating businesses, dinner cruises operating as floating restaurants/party spaces, certain speed boats and jet skis are not allowed. The new lease will have a slightly higher base rent of \$4.4 million. There is a schedule of regular rent increases and additions. The piers remain responsible for upkeep and maintenance of the piles at an approximately \$100 million annual cost.

In return for the additional lease time, the Piers will improve the north-south passageway around and through the facility along with new wayfinding signage and additions to on-site traffic and pedestrian management across the entire site, including removal of existing obstacles on the upland sidewalk along with a commitment to keep that sidewalk clear at all times. MCB4 appreciates and approves the concept of better pedestrian passage.

However, MCB4 has serious reservations about the proposed lease amendments as they do not correct important, long standing pedestrian passage restrictions.

Length of Lease

MCB4 is concerned by the length of the lease. The desire to end its current lease and engage in another, raises questions about why Chelsea Piers expects a lease outside of the banking standard of 25 or 30 years. A lease renewal is also an opportunity to take stock and adapt to changes in context, environment and operations, and adjust them accordingly. The Trust and the community will not get this opportunity again until 45 years from now— an eternity.

Walkway Replaced by Service Road

In 1995 and 1996 when Chelsea Piers was first being developed press stories then noted that false statements were made and commitments were not kept during the development of Chelsea Piers.¹ Top among them was the reduction by half of the walkway proposed between West 17th and West 23rd Streets to accommodate the service road for Chelsea Piers. The service road today is still 27’ wide, while the sidewalk is a mere 8’. In 1996, many members of Manhattan

¹ *Chelsea Clinton News*, “Trash on a Public Route,” April 25 – May 1, 1996

Community Board 4 felt betrayed when Chelsea Piers used its significant financial difficulties to secure bus and taxi drop off spaces and the access roads that were not included in the initial proposal and to take space that had been designated for public use.

The Hudson River Park is the southern terminus of the Hudson River Greenway, and this segment is North America's busiest bikeway. Chelsea Piers is a draw for tens of thousands of people a year and visitors must navigate across Route 9A, the greenway, a lane of parked vehicles and two vehicle access lanes for the attractions in the Complex. Conflict between cyclists and pedestrians are near-constant in this area, and pedestrian safety is further jeopardized by the movement of vehicles, including large production trucks and buses.

Prioritizing access for vehicles in parks was not then and is not now appropriate.

Need to Expand Walkway Under New Lease

MCB4's greatest objection to the new lease is the failure to require the removal of the vehicle parking lane east side of the facility. Eliminating the lane will increase pedestrian access to the piers, expand the sidewalk, and improve pedestrian movement on the upland side of the piers, which right now is narrow, confusing and forces pedestrians onto the roadway or greenway. Given the demand for better traffic and vehicle management across the city, improving of the environment, and the need to create more safe space for pedestrian passage, the fact that no improvement is being made to the traffic lanes is neither appropriate nor acceptable. Removing one lane would not inhibit pier uses or activities provided adequate and appropriate management of the vehicles is employed. Oftentimes the lanes are used for craft services for film shoots or parking. Both of those activities should take place inside the piers, not in the public realm. Given their interior vehicle facilities, it is alarming that Chelsea Piers would be allowed to continue its current outside operations given how much the city and area around it has changed since 1996. If vehicle size is the issue, then Chelsea Piers and its tenants should right-size their fleets accordingly.

MCB4 received a traffic engineer's report "analyzing" the vehicle lanes just before its February Full Board meeting. It mostly describes the current configuration. We are unclear if the direction to the engineer was to eliminate a lane at the outset. The engineer determined that a lane removal was not feasible. Given the length of time Chelsea Piers has been operating and now with this far longer lease term, it is unacceptable that the objection to vehicle lane reduction is because of costs.

This lease should not be finalized without a commitment to eliminate a vehicle lane and create more pedestrian and park-appropriate space along both the inland and waterside of piers 59-61 headhouse.

Parking Space on the Piers

MCB4 was given contradictory information about parking on the piers. MCB4 was told that parking is only for employees of the piers and its tenants. Yet valet parking for weddings and for golfers was mentioned. The availability of 350 parking spaces is a large use of space, especially

with the approach of congestion pricing and the potential reduction of vehicular traffic. That space should be better used to improve pedestrian passage and provide alternatives to what are now curbside services enabling the elimination of a lane outside the pier.

Wayfinding Signage

MCB4 appreciates the concept of new wayfinding signage. However, it felt that the samples shown were too small to be read by bikers and runners and it lacked a consistent pleasing quality. MCB4 requests that the signage also be used to keep runners, bikers and pedestrians out of each other's way.

Appreciation of Scholarship Funding

MCB4 also recognizes the willingness of the Piers to increase the scholarship funding to the community for access to the sports facilities. MCB4 looks forward to that additional scholarship funding. However, as expressed by numerous Community Board Members, the sports complex price point for those not eligible for scholarships remains too high.

Green Energy

Finally, MCB4 was disappointed to learn that installation of green energy is not included in the new lease. It is 2022. Hudson River Park Trust lease agreements must include green energy stipulations, given the costs and upkeep affiliated with a park along the Hudson River Estuary and the eminent danger from sea level rise. MCB4 requests that the lease includes energy requirements and carbon offset mitigation. At a minimum, MCB4 requests ample installation of level 3 electric charging stations with service at cost inside the parking facility. A broad spectrum of alternative energy and energy saving devices should be examined as well.

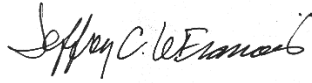
MCB4 appreciates that some of these devices are already being considered by the Piers and, over time, the Piers has installed numerous energy saving devices. Reference to this important attention to energy reduction by the Piers should be included in the new lease. MCB4 looks forward to the installation of additional energy saving devices on the piers in addition to those already in place. We ask the Piers to stay abreast of new energy technologies as they develop and to include them in their operation over the term of the new lease as soon as they become generally available.

New Information to the Community Board

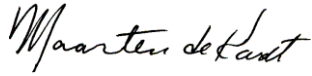
In the week before this letter was approved by the Full Board, the 1994 lease as well as the traffic engineer's report were made available to us. We plan to review these materials and discuss them at upcoming committee meetings. As a result, we fully expect to write and appropriately present addenda to this letter.

MCB4 expresses its appreciation for the extended conversation it had with the Piers and the Trust about the proposed new lease. However, the lease should not be executed as presented and the Board encourages the Trust and Chelsea Piers to go back and address our concerns.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey LeFrancois
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4



Maarten deKadt
Co-chair
Waterfront, Parks & Environment Committee



Leslie Boghosian Murphy
Co-chair
Waterfront, Parks & Environment Committee

Enclosure

cc: Hon. Brad Hoylman, New York State Senate
Hon. Richard Gottfried, New York State Assembly
Hon. Jumaane Williams, NYC Public Advocate
Hon. Erik Bottcher, New York City Council
Hon. Mark Levine, Manhattan Borough President
David Tewksbury, Chelsea Piers

CHELSEA CLINTON

NEWS

Since 1939

Trash On A Public Route

BIKEWAY/WALKWAY NARROWS

BY AL AMATEAU

Community advocates were outraged last week to learn that the width of the walkway proposed for the waterfront between 17th and 23rd Street will be reduced by half to accommodate a service road for the Chelsea Piers sports, entertainment and film production complex.

The state transportation department's final plans for the Chelsea segment of the proposed Hudson River Park esplanade were unveiled at a Community Board 4 waterfront committee meeting on April 18. Other surprises sprung at the meeting were:

- A high bidder for a 16-month lease on state-owned property north of Pier 64 wants to establish a sculpture garden, moor two barges for a floating restaurant and a boat dock, and provide free public open space. The bid, by Steven Touhey Co., will be recommended for acceptance by Hudson River Park Conservancy (HRPC), the state agency with jurisdiction over the property.

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• Ron Delseiner, a rock concert promoter, told waterfront committee members that a rival promoter, John Scher of Monarch Entertainment, is seeking to sublet the ground floor of Pier 63 from the prime tenant, Basketball City, for an open-air rock concert facility. Community board members were outraged at that possibility too. A state Department of Transportation (DOT) spokesperson, however, said the agency had not heard of the concert proposal. Such use would require department approval after consultation with HRPC and the community board.

Bikeway Cut By 1.4 Feet

The walkway in front of the Chelsea Piers headhouse between 23rd and 17th streets was reduced in width in the final plans from 15 to eight feet, while the bikeway was reduced from 16.4 to 15 feet. The reduction, said Doug Curry, of DOT, was made to accommodate a two-way service road for deliveries and trash removal from the sports and entertainment Piers 59-62 and

from the film and television production facilities in the headhouse of the piers.

"It's clear that we've been had," said Ross Graham, a community board member, in an angry exchange with Curry and David Tewksberry, a vice-president of Chelsea Piers. "What we're doing is giving up a walkway to make life more convenient for Chelsea Piers."

Ed Kirkland, another board member, told Curry: "We know very well that you've been ordered to accommodate Chelsea Piers." He noted later that while Gov. Pataki has held off approval of HRPC's plans for a park on the Hudson between Chambers and 59th Streets for more than a year, the governor last year cited Chelsea Piers as an model for future waterfront development.

The reduced walkway would be half the width of a standard sidewalk, Kirkland observed. The Chelsea Piers 27-foot wide service road will have an entrance at 23rd Street and an exit at 17th Street. Tewksberry said the wide road is necessary to facilitate truck deliveries and remove trash dumpsters from Pier 59.