



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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JESSICA CHAIT
Chair

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District Manager

April 7, 2025

Hope Knight
President and CEO
Empire State Development
633 Third Avenue, Floor 37
New York, NY 10017

Re: General Project Plan (GPP) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Bayview Correctional Facility Redevelopment

Dear President Knight,

At its regularly scheduled Full Board meeting on April 2, 2025, Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) voted unanimously to enthusiastically support the proposed General Project Plan (GPP) for the Bayview Correctional Facility Redevelopment. A preliminary version of these comments, approved by the Board's Executive Committee on March 24, 2025, were presented at the March 26, 2025 public hearing held by Empire State Development (ESD).

First and foremost, MCB4 thanks ESD and their partners—Osborne Association, Camber Property Group, Urban Pathways, and Cook Fox Architects—for their collaboration with MCB4 in shaping this project and their commitment to addressing community needs, particularly the need for permanently affordable and supportive housing.¹

Project Overview

The Project Site is located at 550 West 20th Street, New York, New York in Manhattan's West Chelsea neighborhood (Block 691, Lot 1). With MCB4's input, the redevelopment will restore and adaptively reuse the existing 8-story vacant Bayview Correctional Facility while incorporating a new 15-story addition. It will include approximately 124 income-restricted apartments, with at least 60 designated as supportive housing units, and up to 20,000 square feet of community facility space. 10,000 gross square feet of this space will accommodate a Short-Term Transitional

¹ <https://cbmanhattan.cityofnewyork.us/cb4/all-committees/affordable-housing/>

Residence (STTR) program with 15 beds operated by Urban Pathways with 24-hour on-site staff support. Another 10,000 gross square feet will be devoted to a community center with programming for formerly incarcerated individuals and other community-focused uses.

The anticipated unit mix includes approximately 108 studios, 21 one-bedroom, and 17 two-bedroom apartments. Of the 147 income-restricted rental units, at least 60 will serve as supportive housing, while the remaining units will be available to households earning between 60% and 80% of the area median income. The supportive housing units will be prioritized for individuals impacted by the criminal justice system, in alignment with the Osborne Association's mission.

Designed with sustainability in mind, the building will feature all-electric heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems, and will follow passive house standards where feasible, pending structural analysis. This project represents New York State's commitment to creating affordable, energy-efficient housing in Chelsea while addressing the housing crisis, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and strengthening community resilience.

A new addition will be constructed within the building's interior courtyard, increasing the height from 8 to 15 stories. This addition will be set back from the street wall of the historic building and clad in masonry to complement the existing façade. The setback will also allow for a 20-foot-wide terrace on the 8th floor to be used by building residents.

Character-defining architectural features of the exterior, including brick and polychromatic terra cotta ornamentation, will be repaired or restored in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Additionally, the plan preserves key historic architectural elements such as the interior chapel and the tile mosaic from the former pool.

The development will be 51% non-profit owned.

Background

Designed by Shreve, Lamb & Harmon—the architects of the Empire State Building—Bayview opened in 1931 as the Seamen's YMCA. It provided dormitory housing and social spaces until its closure in 1966. In 1967, New York State repurposed the building as the Bayview Rehabilitation Facility, a residential drug treatment center. It was later converted into a women's correctional facility in 1978, housing up to 323 women until its closure in 2012 due to damage from Superstorm Sandy.

Following extensive community input, MCB4 passed a resolution in 2013 advocating for affordable housing, community recreation, social services, and historic preservation at the site. However, the initial redevelopment plan excluded housing and was ultimately unsuccessful. In 2021, Governor Hochul announced that Bayview Chelsea would be redeveloped as supportive housing. After further community engagement, ESD issued an RFP in September 2023, ultimately selecting a 51% non-profit-owned

development team. On February 20th, 2025, the GPP was adopted and entered the public review stage.

Zoning Overrides

The majority of The Project site falls within the C6-3 (Subarea D) zoning district, with a small portion located in C6-2 (Subarea E). Following discussions between ESD and the NYC Department of City Planning, The Project will be governed by the regulations of C6-3 (Subarea D). This zoning designation allows for a base maximum floor area ratio (FAR) of 5.0, with the potential to increase up to a maximum FAR of 7.5 through Qualifying Affordable Housing provisions, High Line Improvement Bonuses, and High Line Transfer Corridor incentives. While the site currently exceeds its Base FAR, it remains underbuilt relative to its Max FAR, leaving room for additional development.

As outlined in the GPP, adhering strictly to existing zoning constraints would make it infeasible to maximize the site's potential, limiting The Project's ability to provide the necessary affordable housing, community facility spaces, and amenities essential to fulfilling its public purpose.

Therefore, to maximize The Project's potential and community benefits, ESD is seeking four zoning overrides:

1. **Floor Area Ratio (FAR):** Increase the allowable FAR to 8.5 across the entire project site without requiring a High Line Transfer Bonus or Qualifying Affordable Housing provisions.
2. **Building Height:** Current zoning permits Maximum Building Heights of 250 ft in Subarea D and 125 ft in Subarea E. The override allows for a maximum building height of 190 ft across the entire Project Site.
3. **Indoor Recreation Room Requirements:** Modifying the requirement for clear and operable windows or skylights to preserve the historic chapel's stained glass windows while allowing its use as a recreation space.
4. **Signage:** Permitting a historic blade sign to extend beyond current zoning limits, up to 500 square feet and a maximum height of 95 feet in order to replicate a historic blade sign naming the building.

MCB4 finds these overrides to be minor in the context of the greater benefits this project will bring to Chelsea and supports the proposed changes.

Environmental Impact

Pursuant to the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), Empire State Development (ESD), as the lead agency for The Project, has classified The Project as an Unlisted Action under SEQRA. An Environmental Assessment has been prepared to evaluate potential significant adverse environmental impacts.

Following a thorough review, ESD has determined that The Project, as implemented in accordance with the General Project Plan (GPP), will not result in any significant adverse environmental impacts. This determination is based on the findings outlined in the Environmental Assessment prepared pursuant to SEQRA.

Because the former Bayview Correctional Facility (originally the Seamen's House YMCA) is eligible for listing in the State and National Registers of Historic Places, ESD, in coordination with the developer, has consulted with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) as required under Section 14.09 of the New York State Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation Law. ESD, OPRHP, and the developer have agreed to implement The Project in accordance with a Letter of Resolution (LOR), with ESD ensuring compliance with all stipulated conditions.²

Further Consideration

MCB4 requests that the following considerations be incorporated into the final project plan:

- Addition of tree plantings and bioswales on the sidewalk along the West 20th Street and 11th Avenue frontages of the building.
- Exploration of solar panel installation on the roofs.
- Community involvement in reviewing the intended use of the community facility.
- Retention and/or restoration of historically significant light fixtures and entrance sconces.
- Preservation and/or reinstallation of existing dedication plaques of historical YMCA use.
- Restoration of the historic terracotta panels with any replacement in kind and relocation of those needing to be moved to accommodate the addition.
- Community access to the chapel repurposed as a community space.
- Maintaining the size of the existing masonry window openings in the original historic structures.
- Separate dedicated outdoor space for both supportive housing residents and short-term transitional facility residents.
- Renaming of proposed "Liberty Landing" to reflect the building's historic significance or its Chelsea location. MCB4 would be happy to provide name suggestions.

² https://www.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/plans/west-chelsea/wc_chap07_historicresources_feis.pdf

Conclusion

MCB4 strongly supports the redevelopment of Bayview Correctional Facility as a project that prioritizes deeply affordable and supportive housing while preserving the site's historic integrity. We recognize the thoughtful collaboration between ESD, the development team, and the community in shaping a plan that not only addresses urgent housing needs but also enhances the Chelsea neighborhood.

While we find the proposed zoning overrides reasonable and necessary to maximize the public benefit of this project, we urge ESD and the development team to continue engaging with the community on critical details, including sustainability measures, historic preservation, and the activation of shared spaces.

With these considerations in mind, MCB4 looks forward to the successful transformation of this site into a lasting asset for the Chelsea community.

Sincerely,



Jessica Chait
Chair
Manhattan
Community Board 4



Kerry Keenen
Co-Chair
Chelsea
Land Use Committee



Gregory Morris
Co-Chair
Chelsea
Land Use Committee

cc: Hon. Brad Hoylman-Sigal, NY State Senate
Hon. Tony Simone, NY Assembly
Hon. Mark Levine, Manhattan Borough President
Hon. Erik Bottcher, City Council