



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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LESLIE BOGHOSIAN MURPHY
Chair

JESSE R. BODINE
District Manager

May 13, 2026

Aidan Connolly
Artistic Director
Irish Arts Center
726 11th Avenue
New York, NY 10019

**Re: Irish Arts Center – 553 W. 51st Street
Phase II Expansion Support**

Dear Artistic Director Connolly,

On April 8, 2026, the Manhattan Community Board 4's (MCB4) Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use (CHKLU) Committee received a presentation regarding the Phase II redevelopment of the Irish Arts Center (IAC or the Center) at 553 West 51st Street. The presentation was delivered by you, Carl Krebs, project architect from Davis Brody Bond, and Susan Wallace, development management consultant from Sterling Project Development and detailed the following opportunities and goals for IAC's Phase II redevelopment:

- Design a code and ADA compliant, neighborhood appropriate new building
- Complete IAC internal connectivity between Phases I and II, connecting the 726 11th Avenue and 553 West 51st Street buildings
- Host more artists and additional types of programming
- Provide more space for community-oriented programming
- Close northern fire egress route for the future Captain Post redevelopment
- Allow for future development of the Captain Post Garden (a CHDC, not an IAC project)

On May 6, 2026, during the MCB4 Full Board meeting, MCB4 members voted 41 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 1 present but not eligible to vote¹, to support the Irish Arts Center Phase II expansion, with the following recommendations for IAC to consider:

- Install a top floor cornice on the top of the Phase I building similar to that proposed for Phase II, to better tie the buildings together in design
- Provide more masonry or other types of architectural details around the windows to decrease the flatness of both the West 51st and Juan Alonzo Garden facades
- Install a design feature or cornice at the top of the first floor to reflect the storefront line of the 11th Avenue residential tenements

Irish Arts Center

Founded in 1972 and based in Hell’s Kitchen, IAC is a home for artists and audiences of all backgrounds who share a passion or appreciation for the evolving arts and culture of contemporary Ireland and Irish America. It presents, develops, and celebrates work from established and emerging artists and cultural practitioners, providing audiences with emotionally and intellectually engaging experiences in an environment of Irish hospitality.

It also provides community education programs and access to the arts for people of all ages and ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. What began as a theater and gathering place for Irish folk musicians and dancers in the 1970s is now a hub for literature, film, visual arts, and multimedia work.

Since 1999, IAC worked with the Hell’s Kitchen community and MCB4 to secure a permanent home for this community institution. In 2021, in partnership with governments of New York City, New York State, the United States and Ireland, and numerous private foundations and individuals, the IAC completed a new \$60 million state-of-the-art new cultural facility at 726 11th Avenue, between West 51st and West 52nd Streets. Securing such diverse funding, coordinating with multiple government and private entities is a testament to their persistence and dedication to Irish culture and art.

Development Background

Clinton Urban Renewal Area (CURA)

In 1969, the City of New York designated the CURA, which included most properties on the six blocks bounded by West 50th Street to the south, West 56th Street to the north, 10th Avenue to the east, and 11th Avenue to the west. The City of New York acquired several sites through condemnation, while others were either exempt or never acquired. See the map below:

¹ Joe Restuccia serves on the Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use Committee. He is the Executive Director of Clinton Housing Development Company, in that capacity, he assists IAC and other former Urban Renewal stakeholders, as an unpaid community consultant. Mr. Restuccia recused himself from voting.



The CURA is primarily a low- and moderate-income, multi-racial and multi-ethnic area with renovated tenements, commercial lofts, small- to medium-sized businesses, and not-for-profit social service and cultural organizations. The 1969 CURA Plan outlined the planned redevelopment, which was later amended in 1980 (First Amended Urban Renewal Plan) and in 1994 (Second Amended Urban Renewal Plan).

When the CURA was condemned in 1969, title to most of the parcels on those six blocks vested in the City of New York. As the CURA was condemned in large swaths, this resulted in the creation of large tax lots with multiple buildings and vacant parcels. Over time, the City began to net lease various buildings on the CURA to local not-for-profits and community organizations as development was not progressing as quickly as originally anticipated.

In 1999, to encourage the development of remaining sites in the CURA, the community developed a plan that led to a mix of private and non-profit development. One of these sites for development was Site 9A, noted in the map below.



Address	Year Completed	# of Apartments
564 West 52 nd Street 565 West 51 st Street	2001	43
Captain Post 560 West 52 nd Street	Public approvals 2015	22
Duncan Police Athletic League 554 West 52 nd Street 555 West 51 st Street	Plans under discussion	n/a
Irish Arts Center Phase I	2021	Cultural Center
Irish Arts Center Phase II	Proposed 2028	Cultural Center

The Irish Arts Center Phase II expansion, noted in the above map in orange is its original home at 553 West 51st Street.

Irish Arts Center—location and redevelopment history

- Since 1972, IAC has been a cultural institution in Hell’s Kitchen originally located at 553 West 51st Street, it expanded to 726 11th Avenue in 2015.
- In 2006, the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the IAC.²
- In December of 2006, HPD net leased the building to Clinton Housing Development Company (CHDC), to facilitate IAC’s development.

² [2006 MCB4 Letter to HPD re Irish Arts Center – Clinton Urban Renewal Area Site 9A](#)

- In November 2010, IAC presented to the CHKLU Committee regarding an update to their proposed Phase I project at 726 11th Avenue.³
- In 2013, IAC presented an updated design for its proposed building at 726 Eleventh Avenue.⁴
- In May and June 2014, HPD and IAC presented their Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) Application #140386HAM, to expand and renovate the existing IAC facilities, and expand the existing Juan Alonzo Community Garden. MCB4 recommended approval of this ULURP application.
- In 2016, reviewed and approved design changes to 2014 approved ULURP plan.⁵
- In 2018, IAC purchased the entire site from the City of New York
- In 2021, IAC completed the construction and opened the first phase of the Center at 726 11th Avenue
- In 2023, IAC began planning the second phase of the Center at 553 West 51st.

Proposed Irish Arts Center Phase II Redevelopment

In their April 2026 presentation to the CHKLU Committee, IAC proposed the following plan for redevelopment.

Additional Theater Space

IAC Phase II proposes a second, smaller, flexible theater space to complement their 170-seat theater completed in Phase I, at 726 11th Avenue. The Phase 2 expansion completes the full plan, which was originally supported by MCB4 in 2014 and approved by the City that same year. That plan called for two distinct venues, one being a 170-seat flexible performance space and the second smaller venue designed with 75 seats to support intimate and grassroots-oriented programming. The addition of this smaller venue will allow artists with smaller but dedicated audiences to perform and benefit from the institutional support of a larger cultural institution. Phase II will also address the lack of code and ADA compliance at 553 West 51st Street.

Change in Fire Egress Routing

Fire egress will be rerouted from the north, through an easement on city owned property, to the south, through the 553 cellar and first floor, being contained entirely with IAC's ownership.

Additional Office and Support Space

Office space will be increased by 22 workstations, 6 private offices and 3 meeting rooms, and restroom. There will be back of house space in the cellar. All floors will be fully code and ADA

³ [2010 MCB4 Letter to HPD re Irish Arts Center – 726 Eleventh Avenue](#)

⁴ [2014 MCB4 Letter to HPD re Irish Arts Center Proposed New and Renovated Building Program and Design](#)

⁵ [2016 MCB4 Letter to CPC re Irish Arts Center](#)

compliant, served by a reconfigured elevator located in the Phase 1 portion of the Center. There was an additional fire stair in the front of the building.

Design Context and Materiality

The building has three floors, but due to the theater use, the floor-to-floor heights are larger than usual. The theater volume is contained in the rear of the first two floors. The overall building height is approximately 48 feet, about a story and a half lower than the residential tenement to the west. The building has a brick facade with punched windows and a rusticated base, in response to the standard design of surrounding Hell's Kitchen tenements.⁶ It has windows looking out both onto West 51st Street and to the west to the Juan Alonzo Garden Extension. There are only emergency and staff entrances and exits at ground level on West 51st Street. The phase two theatre space will either be entered through the main entrance at 726 11th Avenue or through IAC's secondary entrance through the Juan Alonzo Garden.

To bring scale to the building, copper detailing has been added around the punched windows and a copper cornice on West 51st Street and along the Juan Alonzo Garden. There are a series of windows and recesses on the first floor of the west wall to further connect the building design to the garden and the residential building to the west. The brick will match the completed portion of IAC.

Phase II will seek to complement the existing bulk and mass of the 1887 tenement (St. Mary's) at 565 W 51st Street, surrounded by IAC, fronted by the Juan Alonzo Garden and Extension.

Project Construction and Timeline

Construction will begin in February 2027 and be completed in 2028, with projected move-in of that year.

Committee Discussion

The CHKLU Committee indicated its overall support for the building program, for the flexible theater space and creating the needed office and support space. There was a great deal of discussion regarding the functioning and change in the fire egress. IAC noted that the Captain Post Garden would no longer be used as fire egress and remain open space as part of the future CHDC project. That commitment was confirmed by CHDC.

The discussion then turned to how to create more texture and detail on the proposed façade. Committee members appreciated the use of brick in keeping with the neighborhood's tenement design, but suggested ways to tie the Phase II facade better into its surroundings. Those recommendations included the installation of a top floor cornice on the Phase I building, more masonry detail around windows, and a design feature or cornice

Conclusion

MCB4 supports the proposed Phase II plan of IAC in its efforts to create a flexible small theater space, support space, and office space to complete fully functioning program space for the

⁶ See appendix for IAC Phase II renderings.

Center. IAC's continued collaboration with MCB4 brings this important community project to full completion. We urge IAC to continue to work with MCB4 as it refines its designs to incorporate the above recommendations in the final facade design.

In 2026, 20 years after MCB4's first official support letter for the IAC from mid-2006, MCB4 continues to support the center's programs and efforts to create a truly global cultural destination, in a very homegrown and local Hell's Kitchen cultural institution.

Sincerely,



Leslie Boghosian Murphy
Chair
Manhattan Community
Board 4



Paul Devlin
Co-Chair
Clinton/Hell's Kitchen
Land Use Committee



Rachel Lee
Co-Chair
Clinton/Hell's Kitchen
Land Use Committee

cc: Hon. Erik Bottcher, NYS Senate
Hon. Linda Rosenthal, NYS Assembly Member
Hon. Carl Wilson, NYC Council Member
Hon. Brad Hoylman-Sigal, Manhattan Borough President

Appendix – Irish Arts Center Phase II Renderings⁷



⁷ Renderings presented at the April 8 CHKLU Meeting.