



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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JOHN WEIS
Chair

ROBERT J. BENFATTO, JR., ESQ.
District Manager

June 1, 2011

Jessica Katz
Executive Director
Lantern Organization
49 West 37th Street
12th Floor
New York, NY 10018

**Re: Western Railyards Affordable Housing Commitments
SRO Preservation
330-332 West 51st Street**

Dear Ms. Katz:

Thank you for attending the May 19, 2011 meeting of the Housing Health & Human Services (HHHS) Committee of Manhattan Community Board 4 (CB4) to discuss your preliminary plans for SRO Preservation as detailed in the Western Rail Yards Points of Agreement ("WRY SRO Preservation") at 330-332 West 51st Street (the "Site"). CB4 appreciates the Lantern Organization's ("Lantern") commitment to providing affordable housing for Clinton residents and willingness to engage with the existing tenants during this transition period.

Background

As part of the Western Rail Yards Points of Agreement that were executed in 2009 (attached), the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) committed to work with the City Council to preserve up to 150 units of privately owned Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units. To help accomplish that commitment, CB4 and HPD reached out to Lantern to engage in those preservation efforts. While Lantern, a not-for-profit organization, has not yet undertaken any projects in Community District 4, Lantern has already preserved four other SRO buildings, including buildings in neighboring Community District 7. CB4 looks forward to working with Lantern to preserve these SRO units in the Clinton community.

The Site consists of two adjacent buildings with approximately 140 units, of which 90% are occupied both of which are five story walk-ups. Lantern is currently in contract to buy the Site and took over management of the Site approximately 45 days ago. If Lantern does opt to buy the Site, plans are to close in fall of 2011 and to begin construction approximately one year later.

Tenant Concerns

Bennett Baumer of Housing Conservation Coordinators (HCC) and several tenants of the Site were in attendance at the meeting to discuss tenant concerns. CB4 appreciates that Lantern just took over management of the Site recently. We understand in a transition process many issues still need to be sorted out. However, CB4 considers it important to set times for the distribution of information and deadlines for when answers should be received in order to ensure that questions get answered sooner than later.

- **Existing Tenants**
 - Existing tenants, who are in good standing, will remain in residence regardless of what subsidies or programming for rehabilitation Lantern decides to pursue
- **Rent Billing**
 - Lantern agreed to accept weekly as well as monthly payments
 - Lantern stated they do not charge late fees or interest on late rent
 - Lantern will modify rent bills to indicate weekly payments, to not show late charges and to not show timely payments as past due therefore jeopardizing ability to apply for affordable housing at other locations
 - Lantern has agreed to set June 30, 2011 as the deadline to resolve all billing issues so that the July rent bills will be correct
- **Building Maintenance**
 - The tenants are pleased that mailboxes have been installed
 - Tenants noted that bathrooms are not being cleaned daily and public areas are not being swept regularly and Lantern agreed to speak to their porter staff and remedy the problem
 - Lantern agreed to engage an exterminator for both the individual units and the public areas
- **Communication**
 - Lantern has appointed Julius Lamar as the point person to manage building complaints and inquiries
 - HCC, Lantern, and the tenants are organizing a meeting prior to June 15, 2011 to discuss tenant concerns in further detail
 - Lantern has agreed to conduct door to door outreach to meet the tenants
 - Lantern has agreed to arrange a tour for the tenants and CB4 to view a completed building that Lantern owns and manages
- **Proposed Renovation and Relocation**
 - Lantern will try to minimize the tenant disturbance phase but temporary relocation will be necessary during construction
 - Lantern will attempt to temporarily relocate only between the two buildings and not off-site
 - All tenants will have written relocation agreements
 - The relocation will be at Lantern's expense and will be of no cost to the tenants
 - Lantern is exploring the possibility of installing either shared kitchens or kitchenette units within the SRO rooms

Community Board Concerns

Building Rehabilitation

Lantern has been discussing a budget with HPD and is currently in the information gathering stage. Upon initial review, Lantern's engineer has determined that the existing buildings are structurally sound.

As this WRY SRO Preservation comes out of an affordable housing commitment agreed to by the City in the course of the Western Rail Yards rezoning, CB4 wants to ensure the units that are preserved are of the highest quality. These SRO units should represent a long term investment in affordable housing in our community. CB4 appreciates the desire to preserve the large number of units that these two buildings contain, however the goal is not to preserve outmoded arrangements but instead to create highly livable units. Therefore, CB4 is interested in creating:

- Larger, more livable rooms
- Better kitchen facilities
- More bathrooms
- ADA accessible units

CB4 appreciates Lantern's willingness to engage with the tenants and respond to their concerns. CB4 is looking forward to working with Lantern to preserve these WRY SRO Preservation units.

Sincerely,



John Weis, Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4

cc: R. Visnauskas, Deputy Commissioner for Development, HPD
T. O'Hanlon, Assistant Commissioner, Supportive Housing, HPD
NYC Council Speaker Christine Quinn
NYS Senator Thomas K. Duane
NYS Assemblyman Richard Gottfried
Congressman Jerrold Nadler
Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer