

September 8, 2003

Amanda Burden
Chair
City Planning Commission
22 Reade Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: UnConvention Center on Pier 94 – ULURP Nos.: C 040011 ZSM and C 040014 PPM

Dear Chair Burden:

At its regularly scheduled monthly full board meeting held on September 3, 2003, Manhattan Community Board No. 4 held a duly noticed public hearing on the captioned ULURP applications and adopted the following resolution (by roll call vote 36 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 present but not eligible to vote and 0 abstentions):

This Board and its Waterfront and Parks Committee have considered the above applications that serve to permit the use of Pier 94 by the Unconvention Center, Inc (UCI). The trade show operation has occupied the pier for five years to date, and has recently reached an agreement with the city for a seven year lease, with five one-year renewal options.

While the board is required to comment on the above-listed ULURP actions, in this case the lease disposition and the special permit for trade exhibitions, it is one of the two accompanying actions – authorization to modify the zoning resolution requiring public access – that has the greatest impact on the community district and its residents, especially in Clinton.

The letter that follows gives APPROVAL WITH CONDITIONS to these applications, for the following reasons.

This Board has long argued that the city should find a more park-compatible use for Pier 94 than a convention center, due to its reliance on trucking, and the high-density traffic it causes, especially on “moving-out” days. However, the board acknowledges the importance mid-size trade shows are to the city’s economy, and the need to maintain such an operation in the city.

While we were pleased that the city chose to offer the UCI a short-term lease while it reevaluates the long-term use of the piers, the decision hamstrung both the UCI and its ability to renovate the pier, and the board, in its efforts to ensure that the pier remains fully accessible to the public.

UCI argues that it cannot meet waterfront zoning requirements for a perimeter walkway due to the inability of the business to recuperate its costs in a larger scale renovation over the current short-term lease. Therefore, the southern edge of the pier will not be accessible to the public, nor will there be any access to the riverfront along the southern edge of the pier shed.

The board considers this a great loss of public space and public access. We have fought to maintain this access with other tenants of the piers throughout our district, and it is a principle to waterfront use that we consider essential. And it was from our effort to mitigate for this loss of public space that the below requests were born.

In our discussions with the architect and consultants to UCI, we have come to agreement on many of the issues listed below. THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Manhattan Community Board No. 4 approves the above ULURP applications, provided the following be guaranteed by NYC Economic Development Corp in its lease with the Unconvention Center, Inc.:

1. There shall be no signage on the northern or western faces of the structure.
2. There shall be no electronic signage anywhere.
3. The east side signage shall be temporary and related to the current event in the pier with the exception of identifying business signage for UCI.
4. There shall be no permanent signage on the pier, save the signage for UCI's business.
5. Pier 94 shall not be used for special events outside of the business of the Unconvention Center, except in accordance with EDC lease term provisions and the environmental assessment statement.
6. UCI shall construct and engage a concessionaire to operate a café with indoor seating and bathroom facilities in the northern wing of the headhouse. The café's seating and bathroom must be open to the public during all business hours not limited to trade show days. The bathroom and seating must also be open to all, not merely customers of the concession. We are supportive of the initial plans to place the café immediately west of the mechanical room in the northeast corner of the headhouse. We also expect to have further discussions with the architects regarding the café's design as well as with the concessionaire, and facilitate discussions with the designers of the Hudson River Park, so the café will be integrated into the design of the park.
7. UCI will accommodate the landing of a bridge across 9A in front of the pier's northeast corner. A written response from Elyse Kroll indicated that she supported the concept of the bridge, and an option developed in the brainstorming session with her architect, which showed the bridge landing in a corner of the UCI parking lot, would be acceptable to her.

The board would also like to see access to the bulkhead promenade within the Passenger Ship Terminals reopened. Also, the walkway in front of Pier 94 that passes under the automobile upramp has not always been accessible to the public. While we understand this is beyond the purview of UCI or this lease agreement, we ask that EDC make some arrangements for the board to discuss this matter further in order to find possible solutions.

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Finally, regarding the design for the railing along the edge of the pier, we had hoped UCI could use the same rail that will be used throughout the Hudson River Park and in fact will meet the rail at Pier 94. However, since we understand its cost might be beyond the budget of this project, we ask that UCI attempt to match as best as possible the design of the park's railing for aesthetic continuity.

We would like to note that in all of our several meetings with both the architect, Gary Handel, and the consultants, Washington Square Partners and Geto and deMille, the participants have been very cooperative and understanding of our requests. We thank them for their time and efforts, and hope that the requests above can be easily accommodated in their future plans.

Thank you for your attention to this.

Sincerely,



Walter Mankoff
Chair
Manhattan Community Board No. 4



John Doswell
Co-Chair
Waterfront & Parks Committee

Pam Frederick
Co-Chair
Waterfront & Parks Committee

cc: Mayor Bloomberg
MBPO, Lee Chong
Local Elected Officials
Washington Square Partners
Gary Handel Architects
Doug Woodward, DCP
J. Rausch, EDC
Elyse N. Kroll, UCI