



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD No. 4

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J. LEE COMPTON
Chair

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

March 9, 2007

Hon. Shaun Donovan
Commissioner
NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development
100 Gold Street
New York, NY 10038

Re: 530-548 West 53rd Street and 533-541 West 52nd Street (portion of Clinton Urban Renewal Area Site 7)

Dear Commissioner Donovan:

Manhattan Community Board No. 4 writes to recommend that Clinton Housing Development Company and Clinton Housing Association be given site control for the undeveloped portion of Site 7 in the Clinton Urban Renewal Area (CURA) at 530-548 West 53rd Street and 533-541 West 52nd Street so that they may continue to develop their proposal for mixed use and moderate and middle income housing at that location.

The proposal was initially presented to us last year, and was the subject of our April 11, 2006 letter to you expressing our preliminary, conceptual support for the project. The developers presented an update of their written proposal to the community at the February 14, 2007 meeting of the Board's Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use Committee. The basic project is substantially unchanged, but the developers' planning has progressed to the point where site control is necessary in order to continue their planning and secure financing.

THE PROPOSED PROJECT

CHDC and CHA propose to build two separate buildings of approximately 100 residential units each, for a total project of approximately 200 units of affordable housing. CHDC will develop and own the 53rd Street building and CHA will develop and own the 52nd Street building.

Each building will have its own entrance. The residential units in the 53rd Street building will be built on top of an industrial/commercial base that will incorporate LeNoble Lumber, Cybert Tire, Nakanami Carpentry and studios for artists currently at 500 West 52nd Street. The 52nd Street frontage will include a retail store for current site tenant McKinney Welding. This will allow the relocation and consolidation of CURA commercial and industrial tenants to make way for other affordable housing projects in the CURA.

The lot currently occupied by 548 West 53rd Street will be combined with the planned community garden at 550 West 53rd Street to create a 5000 square foot community garden.

The developers propose to use the City's New Housing Opportunities Program (New HOP) or another similar program to develop a mix of studios, one, two and three-bedroom units for individuals and families earning between 80% and 165% of Area Median Income (AMI). Those limits would serve individuals who earn between \$39,680 and \$81,840 per year and families of four that earn between \$56,720 and \$116,985 per year, a population that is underserved by current development practices in our district. This would provide much-needed permanently affordable housing in an area where development pressures are making it increasingly difficult for middle-income families to remain in the community. Community Board 4 has a long-time commitment to creating permanently affordable housing for low- and middle-income families who live in our community, and for the public service workers who serve our community as policemen, firefighters, teachers, librarians, nurses and the like.

The project will meet or exceed the "Green Building Standards" required by Section 224.1 of the New York City Charter.

The site is designated for residential use in the Third Amended Urban Renewal Plan for the CURA, and the proposal to create additional affordable housing is consistent with the Plan and the community's vision for the CURA.

The proposal outlines the arrangements to be made for the site's existing tenants.

ARCHITECTURE AND ZONING

The committee was shown preliminary architectural renderings for both buildings. The design of the 52nd Street building is consistent with the area's industrial vernacular, with large windows, masonry and precast concrete. The design was very well received by the committee. The design of the 53rd Street building is not as well developed, and is challenged by the need to plan for the needs of the industrial tenants on the ground floor. The committee withheld comment until the design is further along, but expressed concern about the potential for conflicts between pedestrians, especially people coming and going from the building's residential entrance and the Flats/Old School, and the curb cuts required for the industrial space.

The site is currently zoned M1-5, and is proposed to be rezoned to R8-A/MX (the MX designation is necessary to allow the proposed industrial uses). This proposed zoning is entirely consistent with the surrounding area and with this community's planning goals. The 52nd Street building would be 12 stories and 118 feet tall and the 53rd Street building would be 9 stories and 91 feet tall. The developers are requesting a zoning text amendment to allow the buildings to eliminate the 15 foot setback that would otherwise be required in both buildings above 85 feet. On 52nd Street, this is entirely consistent with the adjacent industrial loft buildings at 525 West 52nd Street and 549 West 52nd Street. On 53rd Street the impact of the amendment would be minimal. The amendment would allow the creation of additional affordable housing units.

Street trees must be planted as required by Section 96-51 of the Zoning Resolution.

FINANCING

Budget gap. The estimated cost of the project has increased from the \$62 million projected in April 2006 to almost \$74 million. The proposal shown to the committee has a substantial funding gap for which the developers will be seeking additional support from City sources. We support that effort, and believe that additional housing subsidies as well as industrial retention subsidies for the industrial tenants are justified in light of the redevelopment goals for the Clinton Urban Renewal Area.

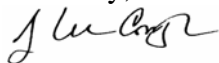
Development right transfers. Approximately \$5.74 million of funding for the project is proposed to be provided through the sale of unused development rights to Tana Seybert, the owner of 525 West 52nd Street, for use in a future expansion and conversion of that building to residential use. We have no objection in concept to the development rights transfer, but are concerned about how those development rights will be used. The scale of a redeveloped building at 525 West 52nd Street must be consistent with its surroundings to the west.

THE DEVELOPERS. CHDC is a non-profit housing organization that has been active in the area with recent projects such as the Flats/Old School and 501-505 West 51st Street.¹ CHA is the oldest affordable housing developer in the Clinton Neighborhood. Both developers have developed good working relationships with the Board, and have demonstrated a commitment to working with the community in developing their plans. We would be pleased to work with them on this project.

If the project moves forward, UDAAP and ULURP applications will be required, with ample opportunity for public consideration of the proposal in greater detail.

At this point, we are pleased to continue to support the proposal in concept, and to request that the developers be given site control.

Sincerely,



J. Lee Compton
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4



Anna Hayes Levin
Co-Chair
Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use

cc: HPD – Holly Leicht, Ruth Anne Visnauskas, Meilan Chiu
Electeds
CHDC
CHA
All tenants
Tana Seybert – Gerry Ritterman

¹ Joe Restuccia, Executive Director of CHDC, is also a member of this Board and of its Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use Committee. His interest has been disclosed, and he is not entitled to vote on any matter concerning this proposal that may come before the Board or the Committee, including approval of this letter.