



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD No. 4**

330 West 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, 26<sup>th</sup> floor New York, NY 10036  
tel: 212-736-4536 fax: 212-947-9512  
www.ManhattanCB4.org

**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: 549 West 52<sup>nd</sup> Street (portion of Clinton Urban Renewal Area Site 7) – Net lease to Clinton Housing Development Company**

Dear Commissioner Donovan:

We write to support the proposal by Clinton Housing Development Company to take over management and operation of the building at 549 West 52<sup>nd</sup> Street pursuant to a net lease with HPD.<sup>1</sup>

The building was acquired by the City more than 30 years ago, when the Clinton Urban Renewal Area was created. It has been used over the years by HPD to house a variety of arts organizations, many of them displaced by development plans elsewhere. Current occupants include the Womens Interart Center, Ensemble Studio Theater, Institute for Visual Research, Medicine Show and Soundscape, among others.

Over the years, the building has suffered from a lack of adequate resources for maintenance and repair. The roof leaks, windows are broken, the elevator works intermittently and hot water runs out of cold water taps. The building has also suffered from a lack of local management. Space has been sublet and tenancies have become confused.

At the February 14, 2007 meeting of the Board's Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use Committee, CHDC presented its proposal, as follows:

- HPD has agreed to maintain 549 West 52<sup>nd</sup> Street as a visual and performing arts center.
- CHDC will focus on basic building maintenance and repairs for the elevator, boiler, plumbing and electrical systems, as well as waterproofing.
- Current prime tenants who directly lease their space from the City of New York would remain at the same rent while a plan for the building is being developed.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.

- The current Women’s Interart Center lease will be terminated; WIC’s sub-tenants will be offered direct month-to-month leases, and space will be leased to WIC appropriate to its needs.
- CHDC will meet with all prime and sub-tenants to sort out tenancy and clarify who actually occupies all spaces.
- CHDC will meet with all prime and sub-tenants to inventory space and use needs to determine the program requirements for the building’s future use.
- The goal of the future plan is to provide permanently affordable studio, performance and administrative support spaces.
- CHDC will report to the Clinton/Hell’s Kitchen Land Use Committee of Manhattan Community Board 4 every 60 days (or as requested) on progress toward clarifying tenant issues and program requirements, as well as addressing building maintenance issues.

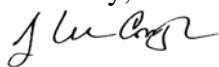
The committee’s meeting was attended by many of the building’s occupants. Ronnie Geist from the Women’s Interart Center understandably refrained from comment. No other occupant voiced any opposition to CHDC’s proposal or provided any information to the committee that challenged the wisdom of the proposal.

CHDC similarly took over management last year of the building at 500-508 W. 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, which is also occupied by arts organizations and individual artists. Since then, tenants of that building have reported a marked improvement in the building’s operation and state of repair.

We are therefore pleased to support CHDC’s proposal to manage 549 West 52<sup>nd</sup> Street as a necessary first step toward developing a long-term plan for the building.

We are delighted that HPD remains committed to maintaining 549 West 52<sup>nd</sup> Street as a visual and performing arts center. With the Clinton Green theater building nearing completion on the opposite corner of the block, and the Irish Arts Center’s plans for 726 Eleventh Avenue, 52<sup>nd</sup> Street has great potential as a secure home for the arts organizations and artists that are now active in the building and the surrounding area and as a magnet for other arts activities. We look forward to working with HPD, CHDC and the arts community toward realization of that potential.

Sincerely,



J. Lee Compton  
Chair  
Manhattan Community Board 4



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

cc: electeds

CHDC

HPD – John Warren

All tenants: Marguerite A.L. Lewitin, Women’s Interart Center  
Denny Denniston and John McCormack, Ensemble Studio Theater  
Don Porcaro, Leslie Wayne, David Shapiro, Institute for Visual Research  
Barbara Vann, Medicine Show  
Verna Gillis, Soundscape  
David Slivka, Artist’s Studio